

EMBRACING INTERRACIAL DIVERSITY ACKNOWLEDGING
BAPTISM AND THE EUCHARIST AS TRANSFORMING
AGENTS OF CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this project was to create a biblical model for the leadership at Temple Terrace United Methodist Church in Tampa, Florida, to embrace other minority cultures as worthy of being instruments of God's grace during corporate worship. Minorities who attend worship with majority cultures are often welcomed to sit in worship and accept what has been prepared for them without creating a safe space for them to share out of their ordained cultural experience. A qualitative research methodology was used to collect and analyze the data.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am humbled that God has saw it fit to allow me to complete this process and for that I am truly grateful for the blessings that was afforded me by the power of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Secondly, I thank my wife, Yvette, for all the support, love, and understanding that she has extended to me throughout our shared life together. She has been the most caring, loving, and patient wife during this arduous three-year process. I am not sure how she does it, but she undergirds and protects me like no other. I have no doubt that my aspirations for success are attributed to her. I also thank our three sons, Jovan, Stephon and Samuel for pitching in during my absences. And I am not sure that I could have made it, if my ten year old daughter, Julissa, and my granddaughter, Leilani, did not keep me sane with their love and innocence.

Special thanks go out to my youngest sister, Marvo Little, who was my chief editor, advisor and motivator. She has walked with me every step of the way, and without her, this adventure would not have been possible. To her I say thank you, sis, our love is eternal.

I never would have known that it took so many people to help you achieve success, so I want to thank United Theological Seminar for providing what I believe is the best Doctoral study program in the nation. I believe as a result, I now can say that I know myself and I am now equipped to do ministry. Many thanks go out to my mentors, Reverend Dr. Donaldson D. Lawrence, and Reverend Dr. Kenneth E. Marcus, and our

senior mentor, Bishop Donnell J. Moore. Thanks also go out to my faculty consultant, The Reverend Dr. Felicia LaBoy, who shared her insight with me during the initial state of my project.

To the members of Temple Terrace United Methodist church for their support and understanding I say thank you, and more specially to the Context Associate Team of TTUMC.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this academic body of work to my late sister, Myrna King, who raised me in the absence of a mother and father. She never lived long enough to witness what her sacrifice and love has inspired me to become, but I hope that God is giving her a chance to smile at her brother, who was once her son. I will always love you, sis, “mom.”

INTRODUCTION

Until there is a collective worldview that necessitates acknowledging all peoples as people of equal worth, interracial diversity will continue to be met with social resistance. Embracing interracial diversity has the potential of taking root if individuals, communities and nations begin to value all human life as sacred, and not as disposable commodities. This psychological adjustment can positively impact behavioral changes and further decrease the violence among nations, as well as condemn and eliminate human exploitation at the micro level. On a global level, it has the potential of creating a culture of celebrating commonalities and respecting differences.

It is important to note however that embracing otherness is most difficult among cultures and races that have experienced a violent history: The enmity among these nations and peoples are deep and polarized. These relationships can be compared to species of the lesser animal kingdom where the stronger devour the weaker as food for their survival. While in the animal kingdom this behavior is viewed as normal, one can only wonder if humanity has embraced a similar worldview, which accepts that the stronger, bigger and those in power are created to dominate and control the weaker and more vulnerable. Dale Aukerman alluded to this as he examined the behavior of those in power by stating that it has been often revealed that the power of evil rests on the power

of imperial speaking, the power by which evildoers seek to create an illusion that “all is well.”¹

If one has to search for answers concerning the reason behind such violence within the lesser animal kingdom, one may conclude that animals cannot reason and therefore they live by their natural survival instincts. This reality lends to the acceptance of the lion devouring the deer, and the fox killing the rabbit as normal and harmonious. Intellectually, most could reason that this behavior is fundamental to their survival and normal in the circle of animal life. How then does this relate to the violence and exclusion expressed among humans who were created as superior to the animal kingdom? What motivates humans to kill, oppress and exclude others? Is it for survival, greed, superiority or mere indifference? Unlike animals, all humanity was created in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:27). Therefore the question that continues to perplex some persons is “How can believers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ live such separate and polarized lives?”

Many converts to the church of Jesus Christ have had a difficult time changing the lenses from which they see the world, God, and God’s purpose for humanity within God’s kingdom. Miroslav Volf captures the essence and purpose of the scattered church of Jesus Christ and has something to teach us. He stated,

All the churches of Jesus Christ, scattered in diverse cultures, have been redeemed for God by the blood of the Lamb to form one multicultural community of faith. The “blood” that binds them as brothers and sisters is more precious than the

¹ Dale Aukerman, *Reckoning with Apocalypse: Terminal Politics and Christian Hope* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1993), 53.

“blood,” the language, the customs, political allegiances, or economic interests that may separate them.²

The church is not a man-made organization, but a living organism that has been created by the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit governs the life of the church; however, one’s entry into this new creation is only possible because of Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross of Calvary. The church then is not an exclusive group of believers who create their own culture, but rather a redeemed community of converted individuals who are gradually transformed into the image of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Volf’s image of the church being a multicultural community of faith is very insightful because it creates the framework by which local churches and individuals should govern themselves as it relates to embracing otherness.

This project examines the extent to which the expression of diversity is embraced in the life of Temple Terrace United Methodist Church (TTUMC) located in Tampa, Florida.

The church’s membership, which is predominantly white, has undergone a constant decline immediately following the construction of the low-income housing project adjacent to the church. Over a period of time, minorities from the community have been attracted to and assimilated into the life of the church. However, most minorities have not experienced a culture of belonging. The majority culture has not made intentional operational changes to foster opportunities for the minorities’ cultures to be expressed. As a result, many minorities find comfort sitting in the back pews during worship and most are not involved in the church’s life and leadership. The minorities

² Volf, Miroslav, *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 53. Kindle Edition.

who do get involved have to assimilate into the majority's culture or observe and receive what is offered. Within this context, this project seeks to determine if an authentic understanding of baptism and the Eucharist would cause members to embrace diverse cultures and allow them to honor the presence of God within the uniqueness of their culture during corporate worship.

To the extent that the secular world is motivated by profits, so should the church be motivated by disciple inclusivity. Inclusivity should not scare the church, but it should ignite the church into missional action. Multiculturalism is not grounded in giving up one's identity as a people as much as it is about living into a new creation. It is within the mandate of making disciples of Jesus Christ that baptism is offered to initiate the converts into the new creation. Volf yearns for the church to grasp the reality that,

Baptism into Christ creates a people as the differentiated body of Christ. Bodily-inscribed differences are brought together, not removed. The body of Christ lives as a complex interplay of differentiated bodies - Jewish and Gentile, female and male, slave and free - of those who have partaken of Christ's self-sacrifice.³

William Sailer will go further to state that baptism is an entering into Christ—the wedding of that bond between the soul and Christ. Thus, baptism is not simply a human act, but God is present in the moment.⁴ This understanding is rich with theological implications and offers the church a broad understanding of Christian baptism. However, Karl Barth will add that baptism does not take place contingently, or capriciously, or mechanically, or under any physical or moral compulsion. It takes place as an act of free

³ Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 48.

⁴ William Sailer et al., *Religious and Theological Abstracts* (Myerstown, PA: Religious and Theological Abstracts, 2012).

obedience to the command of Jesus Christ, in willing recognition of its validity and authority.⁵

What beauty? What would happen if the church allows the Holy Spirit to masterfully create harmony out of diversity, and synergy out of differences? What would happen if born again believers allow the Spirit to create equality by disregarding differences when baptizing people into the body of Christ?⁶

Whereas baptism provides the initial entry into the new creation, the Eucharist is the continuous means of grace that sustains those who have been redeemed. The Eucharist is not a matter of eating and drinking, but it is a matter of the heart; it is the ritual time in which we celebrate God “making-space-for-us-and-inviting-us-in.”⁷ God’s embrace is far-reaching, and God consumes us with His love. Our sins, however horrific, are no match for God’s grace. God’s grace becomes present no matter our condition or predicament. This extravagant generosity that is extended to us is too awesome for us to keep to ourselves, “therefore, inscribed on the very heart of God’s grace is the rule that we can be its recipients only if we do not resist being made into its agents; what happens to us must be done by us.”⁸ There is no place in the redeemed community for exclusion or prejudice, and if those habits linger within believers, then the grace of God that manifests itself through the Eucharist should remind us of what Christ has done for us, and constantly invite us to repent of our sins and seek to create and extend to all the same

⁵ Karl Barth, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God*, Part 4, vol. 4 (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2004), 101.

⁶ Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 48.

⁷ Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 129.

⁸ Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 129.

safe space that was extended to us. This is what we enact as we celebrate the Eucharist. In receiving Christ's broken body and spilled blood, we in a sense receive all those whom Christ received by suffering.⁹

Chapter one shares my spiritual journey, with a contextual analysis of the ministry context of the project. Chapter two examines current theoretical contributions scholars have made in the field of interracial diversity and its applications and outcomes in different organizational contexts. Chapter three sets the foundational framework through Biblical exegesis, historical review, and theological reflections. Chapter four provides a format for the methodology of the project and defines a structure for which the methodology was implemented. Chapter five shares the field experience, the data that was collected and the results and insight of that data. In conclusion, Chapter six presents reflections, summary, and conclusion of the field experience. It also provides lessons learnt and recommendations.

⁹ Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 129.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The relocation of Temple Terrace United Methodist Church (TTUMC) in 1957 from Temple Terrace to the upper west side of Tampa was the hallmark of the ministry's accomplishments. The church's relocation was strategic and visionary until the city of Tampa repositioned low-income housing families from downtown Tampa to the upper west side of Tampa, adjacent to the church. Many of the charter and longtime members who still attend Sunday morning worship are eager to share the early success stories that they experienced together before this relocation.

The diverse and economically at-risk community from downtown Tampa has had a negative impact on the way the members of TTUMC live out their Christian mandate of "Making Disciples of Christ for the Transformation of the World." The poverty that now surrounds the affluent TTUMC created extensive conversation of mission opportunities, but the membership at that time never expected they would be called upon to embrace or create a safe space for this new community and connect relationally. Many of the professionals did not find it necessary or beneficial to expose their family members to such an environment during or after the community's transition.

This economic and demographic shift has created many challenges for TTUMC. The community surrounding the church never changed for the better; instead, it grew progressively worse. Ironically, new developments emerged north of Temple Terrace in

what is called New Tampa, and many younger professional families moved north to take advantage of the new amenities and opportunities it afforded them and their families. The church now found itself in a community in which its location was no longer attractive to the residents of Temple Terrace, and its immediate community of low-income families was not welcomed nor embraced into their church family. As a result, the church's population grew older and declined year after year.

In an effort to revitalize the church, a progressive contingent of church members, led by the senior pastor, created a new Contemporary Worship Service. The majority of the older charter members did not welcome this new service, and as a result it created a lasting schism that continues in the church to this day. The schism had many facets that impeded the growth and unity of the church, but the main resistance from the charter members resided in what they believed to be an attack on their inherent structure of worship to embrace a worship style they considered to be shallow and loud. The worshippers of the traditional service were forced to give up their traditional fixtures such as the altar, lantern, and baptismal fount, for drums, guitars, a keyboard, and a fragile moveable stand used by the pastor and the liturgist. These physical changes threatened the very survival of their legacy.

Additionally, the Bishop of the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church continued to change pastors, and members continued either to transfer to other churches or transition into nursing homes and eventually died. This incessant inner conflict prevented the church from ascertaining why God had allowed this diverse and economically at-risk community to emerge at their doorstep and discovering its mission as it related to this new community.

A deeper look at this polarized dynamic is implicit in the behavior of the members of TTUMC who have allowed their immediate community to define their ministry focus. Their refusal to connect relationally with their Tampa community has crippled and restricted them from moving beyond the quarter-mile radius of their church to evangelize and broaden their scope of ministry and membership base. It seems as if the immediate community has subconsciously taken them on a guilt trip, one they have not been able to overcome up to this present moment.

Notwithstanding the hurdles that TTUMC had to confront, the Bishop appointed a minority male to be their senior pastor. It was clear that this appointment was a direct result of the low-income minority community that surrounded the church. What was also obvious was the lack of foresight by the Bishop as it related to the response of the members of TTUMC in imposing a minority pastor to lead them in this declining era of their church. What was not clear with this appointment however was the role expected of the newly appointed senior pastor; was he positioned to pastor the Caucasian church or to provide outreach to the minority community?

Initially, many key influencers believed that the appointment of a minority pastor was the best decision due to the make-up of the community surrounding the church. However the leadership never sufficiently analyze the implications of sitting under the counsel and leadership of a minority pastor, especially concerning the impact it would have on the older, traditional worshippers. Even less conversation evolved around the impact it would have on the greater Temple Terrace Caucasian community which the church targeted for most of their membership.

My appointment to TTUMC in 2008 as senior pastor was overwhelming at best; once again, I found myself the outsider. What was now different in this pastoral assignment was the leadership responsibility and influence that came with the position. With all of my experiences of being an outsider, God was giving me an opportunity to positively influence the behavior of others from a place of wholehearted living. It was as if God was preparing me for this assignment all my life and now the moment had arrived.

My early church experience at the church of the Nazarene in Barbados, West Indies, had given me a model of how a church community should function. Church was a family unit, particularly through the life of the pastor and the leaders, who loved me and cared for me as a person of value. The church membership was fully aware that my father was absent from my life and that he was an alcoholic. They were also cognizant that my mother had immigrated to the United States of America, never to return to nurture her family. It was evident in our early years that our family was lacking financially; however, those circumstances never deterred them from loving me and wanting the best for me. The church saw the best in me, before God allowed me to see it.

What led me to feel like an outsider in Barbados was the dynamics of my family. However, in the United States, my outsider experience was wrapped in my cultural and ethnic identity. My accent was different, my Christian values were different, and in some way my physical features were different. Others saw me as different and they treated me as such.

My first higher learning experience at Morristown Junior College, a historic Black institution, provided me the opportunity to live out my cultural uniqueness. It was my first significant opportunity to change the way insiders perceived and treated outsiders.

Although we were all Black students they still perceived me as an outsider; a foreigner. They made fun of my accent and any other characteristic about me that made them feel comfortable in their own space, particularly when they were in groups. They would act somewhat differently when they were by themselves. It was not long before I realized their behavior was a result of their ignorance of my cultural identity; they never took the time to get to know me as a person. My goal was to address their misconceptions and give them an opportunity to see beyond my accent due to their fears born of ignorance. Equally important was for me to understand their culture and learn from their experiences.

It was in my second semester at Morristown Junior College (MJC) that God elevated me to Student Government Association President. It was as if God was giving me a taste of how it felt to persevere and provide leadership through the difficult times of exclusiveness, in order to create opportunities and open doors of inclusion. It was a surprise that God wanted me to be a leader in this effort so early in my transitory life in the United States. God was equipping me in spite of my pronounced accent and rapid speech impediment.

I began acclimating to the African American way of life and understanding their perspective politically, socially, and economically; their struggles were my struggles and their story was my story. What was surprising was that neither of us understood how much we had in common culturally and philosophically. As an African people, we were exposed to similar injustices that impeded our socioeconomic progress, not to mention the disintegration of our educational and family structures. The lessons learned

throughout those two years at Morristown Junior College (MJC) were pivotal in the understanding of my giftedness and graces for ministry in a diverse setting.

My acceptance to Drew Theological Seminary, in Madison, New Jersey, upon graduating from MJC afforded me an experience that was unique and life changing. It informed my life and moved me beyond conversation and literary exposure to a stark reality of racial intolerance that I had not personally experienced before attending Drew.

Campus life at Drew was segregated. Koreans hung out together, Blacks clustered in small groups and the majority of the white faculty and student body moved around campus with a sense of confidence and ownership that was not expressed by the other minority groups. Observing this made me feel like a stranger. A day did not go by without my questioning God about His reason for allowing me to attend this seminary.

It was early in my first multicultural/multiethnic environment that my professor of Introduction to Theology, stated, “You did not belong at Drew.” This comment was written on my first submitted assignment. This remark was hurtful and embarrassing, but I never shared this with my Professor. Instead, my goal was to complete the semester and then withdraw from the seminary.

Eventually, God gave me the confidence needed to return to Drew and graduate with my Masters of Divinity Degree. In many ways, a sense of personal and institutional failure loomed heavy over me for my failure to sit with my professor as a man of worth and give him an opportunity to share his reasons why he felt I did not belong at Drew, especially since I graduated as an honor student from Clark Atlanta University with a Bachelors of Arts degree in Business Administration and Finance. My transition into the Masters of Divinity program was very difficult initially, but the issue was not my lack of

competence, it was a matter of understanding the different vocabularies and nuances of this new field of study.

There is a huge difference between not being prepared for a task and not belonging. Telling someone that they do not belong is unacceptable in any area of life. This failed opportunity to lend my voice to what was insensitive to a minority student was also pivotal in my journey of understanding my worth. It has also strengthened my resolve to be true to myself as a man. If my professor had taken the time to hear my story, then he would have been better able to make an assessment of what he felt my future should have been. It was through the support of my mentor and other friends in ministry that prevented his comments from sabotaging my calling, hence my pastoral ministry. My resolve to return to Drew and finish my degree was a testament to the benefits of staying engaged even though the climate was not healthy or wholesome.

In this multicultural/multiethnic society in which we live, people take for granted the worth of others, particularly if they do not value them as people of worth. It is therefore natural for many to live a life of exclusion and never truly engage or connect with others, especially others who are different. Brene Brown defines connection as “the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.”¹ Therefore, in order for connections to exist between diverse groups there must be an authentic sense of respect and worth that is felt by all involved.

TTUMC has been avoiding the diversity and poverty that surrounded them over the years, and ironically, for the last five years they have been graced with a minority

¹ Brene Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be* (Center City, MN: Hazelden Publishing), 19.

pastor to lead them through their declining years into the purpose for which they are called. There were many challenges within this initial union. Many faithful members of the church transferred to other United Methodist churches within the first year of my appointment, and the staff rejected every attempt to build community and follow my leadership. Within three years the entire caucasian staff had resigned from their positions. Complaints about my style of leadership reached the Staff Parish Relation Committee, the District Superintendent, and the Bishop. On many occasions accusations were made of me being abusive; this lead to reprimand without due process, and members reported my every idiosyncrasy to my superiors each opportunity they got. It was evident that many members did not want a minority to be their senior pastor.

Within the past five years, in spite of its deep internal conflicts, the church's leadership has continued to function and accomplish many meaningful goals. The sanctuary has been renovated to reestablish the traditional feel of worship that is acceptable to the current charter and senior members of the church. The grounds are well maintained and all of the buildings on the property are in good to great condition. We have also seen a strengthening in our mission ministry. We have supported our sister church in Cuba by inviting and introducing the pastor and his wife to our church, and we have sent six of our members to Cuba to reinforce this ministry. We have also adopted Riverhills Elementary School, Palm Terrace Nursing Home, and River of Grace Homeless Men Shelter. These mission opportunities have kept the church relevant over the past five years.

There is a new mindset of leadership that has emerged over the last three years. These individuals primarily attend the Contemporary Worship Service and are open to

change and otherness. However, some of them are still influenced by the stories of the church's past, and they live in fear of coming into conflict with those who do not want to let go of their exclusive ways of life. We are prayerfully discerning how to secure the past legacy of our church while embracing the reality of our vision of "Becoming an Instrument of Hope in our Community."

We are continuously having conversations on expectations of church leadership and the ability to change the culture of the church to a more accepting, accountable and inclusive body of believers. These conversations are intended to create openness and acceptance of genuine diversity by welcoming those who show an interest in belonging and ownership. These conversations are also intended to move the church beyond diverse inclusion out of guilt or pity to a healthy place of love, respect, accountability, and wholehearted ministry.

It has taken five years to highlight the cultural differences, personal preferences, and racial intolerance to our key leaders and influencers of our church. The church is still in membership and financial decline primarily because we are not living out our divine purpose of authentic diversity. Most of the membership would attest to the fact that the church is growing spiritually and we are positioned to launch new and exciting ministries that would be reflective of such a spiritual maturing.

We are aware that we have not invested in wholehearted relationships within the body of our church. The Caucasians, Blacks, and Hispanics still operate in silos during worship and activities, and the conversations among these groups are functional and peripheral. This has been identified as the area where the work of transformation must begin, and this is where my life's journey and our church's need have intersected. We as

a body of Christian believers must begin to learn each other's culture and appreciate the wholesome beauty of God's creation in people who are different racially, economically, educationally, and ideologically. The church is at its best when all people are welcome and treated as people of worth.

Throughout this course of study, exploring how the church can authentically embrace a community of otherness and, over a period of time, transfer that otherness to uniqueness and creativity is critical.

My life's journey has gifted and equipped me to give others the opportunity to embrace otherness from a place of strength and wholehearted living. Individuals who exclude others from participating in life by not being welcoming and accepting are robbing that person and themselves of experiencing the richness and creativity of being God's creation. The church should not choose who they connect to or embrace, but should embrace all people whom God has placed within their sphere of influence.

There are many fears that influence how people treat others, and these fears are present in all cultures and people regardless of status, education, or race. If the Bible is correct, that perfect love drives out all fear (1 Jn 4:18, NIV), then the church should be leading the fight against exclusion, indifference and racial intolerance. Brené Brown shares her perception that "many people today are struggling with the belief that they are not good enough to be worthy of love and connection. This collective belief is so strong that it is actually reshaping our culture. The shame created by feelings of unworthiness is giving rise to anger, disconnection, blame, and dangerous forms of comparison, conditions that create a culture of scarcity."²

² Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead* (Mountain View, CA: Garamond Press), 75-79. Kindle Edition.

According to Brené Brown, “Vulnerability is the core, the heart, the center of meaningful human experiences.”³ The leadership at TTUMC will therefore wrestle with our true selves and participate in other peoples’ cultures from a position of wholeheartedness. We will learn how to be vulnerable and Christ-like to all persons we engage in ministry at TTUMC and within our community.

³ Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable*, 12, Kindle Edition.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Old Testament

The acceptance of diversity continues to emerge as one of the most complex human dynamics of our time, and its dynamic nature continues to polarize both the secular world and religious institutions. Intriguingly, more progress has been made in the celebration and toleration of diversity in the secular arena than in the Christian church. These secular improvements were realized as a result of the agitation of Civil Rights and Human Right activists for the creation of laws that ensure equal rights and justice for all people. Conversely, many in the majority culture of the Christian faith who explicitly use the Bible as their authoritative moral compass have unwittingly and arguably interpreted biblical texts through the lens of segregation, separatism and the superiority of one race over another.

A casual study of the Christian Bible would appear to indicate that God has ordained human creation in a superior/inferior manner because of the many examples in the biblical text that tend to favor groups of people and reject others. Scripture records that God informed the people of Israel how special they were to God. Moses echoed, “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; it is you the Lord has chosen out of all the peoples on earth to be His people, His treasured possession” (Dt 14:2-3). When some

speak of cultural diversity, it connotes not only a sense of difference and preference, but it also engenders language of polarized categorization of superiority versus inferiority.

The periscope of Ruth 2:8-13 gives rise to an opportunity to preview the work of redemption in the midst of cultural diversity and to examine how unity in diversity evolved in the Old Testament era. The main characters of this passage lived in Israel and Moab. There was hostility between these two regions because of the oppression of Israel by Moab during the period of the Judges (Jgs 17:6; 21:25). Friendly relationships were therefore discouraged between these nations because the Moabites did not welcome and assist Israel when they were delivered from Egypt (Dt 23:3-6).

This narrative is staged as a transition of two diverse families being influenced to make decisions based on economic opportunities and relational commitments. In the first transition, a severe famine forced Elimelech to flee Judea with his wife Naomi and their two sons to live in the land of Moab in pursuit of a better way of life. However, the decision to leave their homeland to live in a historically hostile environment culminated in Naomi losing her husband and two sons to death. These negative experiences in the land of Moab created a sense of abandonment for Naomi, which led to bitterness and resentment towards God.

On the other hand, Ruth a Moabite was then faced with the decision of leaving her country and relocating to Israel, an unwelcoming foreign region, with Naomi her mother-in-law, due to the relational loyalty which she had developed with her.

The New Testament passages of study from Acts 10:19-29; 34-36; 44-48 provide another account of acceptance in diversity between Cornelius, a Roman Centurion, and the Apostle Peter, a Jewish leader. Both men were living righteous lives before God in

their respective geographical locations. Intentionally, God revealed God's purpose to each of them in the form of visions. Both men responded to their instructions positively and immediately without having a full understanding of the vision's meaning. Central to this passage is Peter's confession that it was unlawful for Jews to associate with or visit a Gentile (Acts 10:28).

Similarly, the context in which I serve does not stand in isolation. The people within the congregation of Temple Terrace United Methodist Church (TTUMC) are not without a history. Arguably, it is as a result of our collective history that the unity and harmony of our diverse cultures is being inhibited from emerging into ways that are authentic.

The problem that materializes in the context at TTUMC is one of denial and imposition as the Church seeks to live out its mission of being an instrument of hope in its diverse community. One can say that the modern interpretation of Acts 10:28 still surfaces in different ways. The behavior that many model today is: "It is not customary for many of the majority culture to associate or visit the minority culture's homes."

Scripture is full of references that demonstrate ways in which unity in the midst of diversity is possible if the church is willing to be vulnerable to the workings of the Holy Spirit. As diverse and polarized as life can be, God has demonstrated through scripture that differences complete us. Therefore, the purpose of this foundation is to demonstrate that diversity and otherness were designed to create wholeness and synergy wherever diversity exists. The periscope of Ruth 2:8-13 will shed some light on how people from diverse and cultural settings interacted with each other as they understood God's intentions for their time and setting.

Historical-Cultural Context

According to Walter Elwell, most scholars have agreed that the authorship of the Book of Ruth is unknown, which provokes varying argument of the date in which it was written. There is a consensus however that the book must have been written sometime after the beginning of David's reign.¹ The absence of an author and the uncertainty of the date however, provide the researcher with an opportunity to pursue the book's mystery and unravel its complexity through the lens of their own research and experiences.

As documented by Kendell Easley, the Book of Ruth has many themes, and the contrasts in the book are part of its literary attractiveness: pleasant versus bitter; full versus empty, living versus dead.² This style gives the reader an opportunity to engage the story from varied entry points and connect to this family's journey with different emotions. The themes also prevent the story from being stagnant.

Roy Gingrich explains that the events recorded in the book of Ruth took place during the period of the Judges and proposes that the Jews of the Old Testament era commonly considered the book of Ruth as a part of the book of Judges.³ He further articulates that the land of Moab provides the background for the first chapter of the book—the Moabites being the descendants of Lot through Lot's incestuous union with his eldest daughter; while the little town of Bethlehem is the background of the remainder of the book.⁴

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1871.

² Kendell H. Easley, *Holman QuickSource Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2002), 57.

³ Roy E. Gingrich, *The Books of Judges & Ruth* (Memphis, TN: Riverside Printing, 2006), 30.

⁴ Gingrich, *The Books of Judges & Ruth*, 31–32.

Ironically, the narrator manages to narrate the story away from the cultural chaos of the time period of the Judges and focuses on the dynamics that impacted the two families. What is clear is that during the period of the Judges a famine came to the land of Israel. To escape the famine, Elimelech and his family left Bethlehem to dwell in the land of Moab. While in Moab, Elimelech died and his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion then each took a wife from Moab: Orpah and Ruth. After a period of time had passed the two sons also died, leaving three widows in the family of Elimelech.⁵

Eugene Roop wrote that there is no easy way for a childless widow to fulfill her basic human needs. If the deceased husband has brothers, a kinship marriage might be arranged, providing a son (or more) for the widow and thus a place in the husband's family [Kinship Marriage].⁶ Elwell's states that legally the widow was ignored for purposes of inheritance, and if her husband died prematurely this was considered a judgment for the life he had led. She then became an object of reproach, partly for her inability to prevent his untimely death.⁷ Elwell further states that the plight of the widow was recognized in the number of laws designed for her protection and even survival, and the poverty of widows and the cruel treatment extended to them was so widespread that frequent reference is made to it (Jb 24:21; Ps 94:6; Is 1:23; Mal 3:5).⁸

⁵ Gingrich, *The Books of Judges & Ruth*, 33.

⁶ Eugene F. Roop, "Ruth, Jonah, Esther," *Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2002), 30.

⁷ Elwell and Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 2141.

⁸ Elwell and Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 2141.

Literary Context

Fredrick Bush argues that the determination of genre is unmistakably of critical importance for the interpretation of the book of Ruth, but the determination of the genres of Old Testament narrative literature is a notoriously difficult task.⁹ Gunkel postulated that the content, the structure, and the poetic tone of a great deal of Old Testament narrative demonstrated that these narratives existed as oral folklore in poetic form before being committed to writing in their present prose form.¹⁰ He concluded therefore that one is justified in speaking of a Ruth novella.¹¹

With the understanding that the book of Ruth started as an oral poetry and then emerged into a short story, one can imagine how complicated it would be to interpret the meaning of the narrator. Poetry can be very multifaceted and can be deciphered in a variety of ways. Therefore the book of Ruth can be read as a love story, but it can also be read from the perspective of two diverse, blended families working through their devastating fatalities and still being loyal to each other.

Bush acknowledged that the narrative structure of Ruth is controlled by what Beekman, Callow, and Kopesec describe as a “problem-based plot.” In such narratives, a problem or conflict of some kind gives rise to a series of actions and interactions that move toward a resolution.¹²

⁹ Fredric W. Bush, “Ruth, Esther,” *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 9 (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 32.

¹⁰ Bush, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 33.

¹¹ Bush, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 33.

¹² Bush, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 37.

The narrator is now establishing a connection between the two main characters in the story, Ruth and Boaz. Boaz is taking the initiative to extend favor towards Ruth (Ruth 2:8). Eugene Carpenter explains that the Hebrew word *Chen* means favor or grace. It is formed from the root of the verb *chanon*, meaning “to show favor, be gracious, or to extend favor.”¹³ To this point nothing has indicated why Ruth should be singled out among the other servants and foreigners who were gleaning for their daily ration. Bush shared that Boaz is urging Ruth to “stick close to” the women workers who are gathering the cut grain and binding them into sheaves, i.e., she is to glean in that portion of the field normally off limits to gleaners.¹⁴

According to Bush, Boaz also uses his authority and instructed his workers not to bother Ruth. To bother means literally “to touch” (see, e.g., Gn 3:3). It can also mean “to strike violently, injure” (e.g., Gn 32:26) but also “to trouble, molest, interfere with” (2 Sm 4:10; Jer 12:14).¹⁵ Bush also said that recognizing this removes the incongruity that troubles Sasson (50), i.e., that of harvesters molesting gleaners exercising their customary rights.¹⁶

According to Daniel Block, foreigners would normally draw water for Israelites, and women would draw for men (Gn 24:10–20). Boaz’s authorization of Ruth to drink

¹³ Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 59.

¹⁴ Bush, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 121.

¹⁵ Bush, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 122.

¹⁶ Bush, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 122.

from water his men had drawn is therefore indeed extraordinary.¹⁷ It was Boaz, the one with the authority, power, and influence who extended the initial hospitality. Ruth was not in a position of status even to approach Boaz. This models for us the importance of persons of privilege providing opportunity and creating a safe space for those who normally would be excluded and marginalized.

According to chapter 2:10, Ruth is grateful to Boaz for his generosity, and accepted his acts of kindness. Her immediate response was to fall prostrate before him. Bush explained that “dropping to the knees and touching the forehead to the ground enact this gesture; although it is usually reserved for deity and royalty, it also is used with lesser personages as a gesture of greeting or paying homage.”¹⁸

Ruth’s response to Boaz’s attention and generosity led to self-evaluation and the question of “why would he notice me?” (Ru 2:10, CEB). One would wonder why Ruth would feel not worthy of approach. Is it possible that her response was triggered by the fact that she was a woman, and hence the culture of servitude eroded all self-confidence and self-worth? It is interesting that Ruth associated Boaz’s gesture of generosity as unusual not because she was a woman, but because she was a foreigner. Consequently, Sasson is struck by the incongruity of Ruth’s reaction in verse 10, deeming it “somewhat an exaggerated display of gratitude.”¹⁹

Ruth was surprised that Boaz took notice of her, or recognized her. This internal questioning of Ruth was the result of the barriers that separated the people in these two

¹⁷ Daniel Isaac Block, “Judges, Ruth,” *The New American Commentary*, vol. 6 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 659–660.

¹⁸ Bush, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 122.

¹⁹ Bush, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 122.

regions. However, the diversity was even greater; Ruth was a female, foreigner, servant, and poor whereas Boaz was a male, rich, influential, and living in his hometown. It was the uniqueness of God's created design, and the socio/political and cultural realities of their time that polarized what God had intended to be together.

Theologian Michael Welker in his lectures on "Creation and Reality" makes the point that the wholeness of creation is dependent upon difference. The interconnectedness of different aspects of creation is important to the fullness of the reality of the world. We cannot live without difference.²⁰ However, Loren Johns wrote that diversity is beautiful only if some unifying factor provides a sense of order in all the chaos.²¹ Taking these perspectives into account we might surmise that a principle motif that resulted from the differences that Ruth and Boaz shared was not designed to polarize them, but instead to bring about wholeness. It is when we look beyond ourselves and realize that we are lacking in completeness, whether we have much or little, that embracing otherness becomes wholesome.

If Ruth is to become the wife of Boaz and the mother of his child, then they needed to let the things that divided them take second place to the things that united them. They will also need to celebrate each other's diversity in order that unity and love could emerge and flow from their union. Ruth will need to look past her status of being a foreigner, and embrace it as uniqueness. Ruth's first husband Mahlon was a foreigner from Bethlehem. The reason he was a foreigner was because he migrated from

²⁰ Richard L. Christensen, "On the unity and diversity of the church: living in unity in a time of divisiveness." *Prism* 22, no. 2 (September 1, 2008): 59-64. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed February 27, 2014.

²¹ Loren L. Johns, "Unity and diversity in the canon: implications for the church." *Vision (Winnipeg, Man.)* 11, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 74-83. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed February 27, 2014.

Bethlehem to Moab and met Ruth and married her in Moab. Maybe there were qualities that she had as a foreigner that attracted her to the family.

One of the most significant uses of the word foreigner in the Old Testament is in the book of Ruth. Ruth is described as a foreigner (*nokriya*). Carpenter shared that the narrator often reminds the reader of her status as a Moabitess (Ru 1:4, 22; 2:2, 6, 21; 4:5, 10).²² Therefore what defines Ruth is not the location of her birth, but the purpose that was assigned to her life by God.

In verse 11, Boaz explains to Ruth that his demonstration of generosity towards her was predicated upon her prior sacrificial action that took place back in Moab. Boaz was not only touched by Ruth's actions of caring for Naomi, his relative, but by her decision to leave her family, nationality and God to be with Naomi. Block informed us that there are other angles to approach that could suggest why Boaz was generous to Ruth. The narrator had introduced him as a noble character in 2:1 and a genuine member of the community of faith, one who embodies the standards of covenant faithfulness.²³

One might argue that there is a transformative quality of embracing otherness that operated throughout the extended family of Boaz. Elimelech did not avoid taking his family to Moab during the famine in Bethlehem, nor did his two sons avoid taking two Moabite women to be their wives. One could assume that if Naomi was hostile or abusive to Orpah or Ruth, Ruth would not have given up everything she had left to accompany her to Bethlehem.

²² Carpenter and Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words*, 63.

²³ Block, *The New American Commentary*, 662.

God is not absent in this story. Boaz knew that only God knows the hearts of individuals and that He rewards completely (Ru 2:11). Block stated that because Boaz was not satisfied with answering Ruth's question, or content with his own generosity, he invokes Yahweh to intervene on her behalf as well."²⁴ The verb for "repay," *šillēm*, is derived from the same root as *šālôm*, "peace; wholeness."²⁵ Boaz wanted Ruth to receive a blessing that will first heal her from the inside, from all the pain and suffering that she had experience in her past.

In verse 13, the exchange between Boaz and Ruth is more intimate than one may anticipate. It seems as if Boaz broke through her grief and pain with tenderhearted compassion. It was not only what was said, but also how he said it. He did not speak to her in a condescending manner, but he spoke to her as a person of worth. He spoke kindly to her. Jan de Waard documented that the phrase "speaking gently" is literally represented in Hebrew as "have spoken to the heart of your servant." In Hebrew the use of the third person, "your servant," emphasizes the respect which Ruth shows for Boaz.²⁶ What is important to note is that Ruth's physical condition or her physical station did not permanently change even though Boaz gave her temporary protection and food sent her home with food. She was still a poor foreigner gleaning in the field to provide sustenance for herself and Naomi. So what is it that has changed with Ruth? Ruth's attitude of thankfulness reflected a woman with a sense of worth and belonging. She knew that she was different, but for the first time in Bethlehem she was spoken to and addressed as a

²⁴ Block, *The New American Commentary*, 662–663.

²⁵ Block, *The New American Commentary*, 663.

²⁶ Jan de Waard and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Ruth*, 2nd ed., UBS Handbook Series (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1991), 34.

person of worth. Ruth is also thankful to Boaz for taking the time to see her as a person. It is only when we see people for who they are that we can break through the defensiveness of their pain, grief, and anger. That is why Ruth could say to Boaz that his gratitude had brought her comfort.

Ruth's humility has played itself out throughout this narrative. Ward echoed, "wherever the quality of humility is found in the Old Testament it is praised" (e.g. Prov 15:33; 18:12), God's blessing is frequently poured upon those who possess it, and the importance of this virtue springs from the fact that it is found as part of the character of God.²⁷

The religious, cultural, socio/economic and political diversity in the book of Ruth were lived out primarily between two families. The narrator of Ruth in her/his story silenced the outside influences that dictated the behaviors of these two families. One would wonder how Ruth was treated in the Jewish worship context and in her day-to-day life, out of her family context. However, it is important to note that Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi were able to see past the differences of their belief system for a purpose that was bigger than they were. However, an important factor of Ruth's narrative cannot be ignored. Ruth gave up her God, hence her religion in her decision to unite with Naomi.

New Testament

In the New Testament narrative in Acts chapter 10:19-29; 34-36; 44-48, there are not as many socio-economic disparities as they were in Ruth. Whereas there is a divide between the Jews and the Gentiles, the main characters are evenly matched in the

²⁷ de Waard and Nida, *A Translator's Handbook*, 491.

socio/economic and political arenas of their regions. The presence of the Holy Spirit is active in the narrative in an effort to bring to pass His purpose. Therefore, in this New Testament periscope of Acts we will continue to explore God's purpose for unity in the midst of diversity. We will examine how God, in the form of the Holy Spirit, intercedes in the lives of two righteous men in an effort to give them a greater understanding of God's will and purpose for humanity.

Historical-Cultural Context

John B. Polhill documented that scholars of all persuasions agree that the third Gospel and the Book of Acts are written by the same author and that both Luke and Acts are dedicated to the same person, Theophilus (Lk 1:3; Acts 1:1). He also stated that the conclusion to Luke's Gospel provides an introduction to the Book of Acts.²⁸ Although it is evident that the name Luke does not appear in either of the volumes, the Christian tradition identifies Luke, the physician who travelled with the Apostle Paul, to be the author.²⁹

Robert W. Wall shared that Acts was written to Theophilus, a wealthy patron who provided funds to enable Luke to write a detailed narrative of the Church's beginning for public consumption.³⁰ Wall also stated that the Book of Acts was written to consolidate disparate faith communities and address a religious movement that lacked solidarity with

²⁸ John B. Polhill, "Acts," *The New American Commentary*, vol. 26 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 23.

²⁹ *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 34.

³⁰ Robert W. Wall, *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, 7.

its diverse members. Luke believed that the division within its diverse membership, if continued, would cause the church to be ineffective in advancing its claim.³¹

Harold Mare documented that:

Although some have placed the writing of Acts as late as AD 115–130 or 80–95, based on insufficient theological and historical comparisons, the best evidence supports the view that Luke, who no doubt took notes along the way in his journeys with Paul (including the time he was in Palestine, Acts 21) all the way to Rome (Acts 28:16), was the one who wrote Acts during Paul's first imprisonment (ca. 60/61–63/64), and not later, because there is nothing in Acts about Nero's persecutions after the fire at Rome (AD 64) nor the second imprisonment of Paul and his death.³²

Who was Luke? Walter Elwell shared that,

We do not know where Luke was born, or about his death. Paul excludes him from the list of his Jewish co-workers (Col 4:14). He seems to exemplify those Gentiles who welcomed the gospel and persisted in the faith. Paul refers to Luke as "the beloved physician" (Col 4:14). He was apparently known and loved by those bonded together in the gentile mission. He appears to have used his gifts unselfishly, and cultivated friendships in the process. Paul anticipates no argument in describing him as "our friend."³³

Elwell seems to be painting a picture of Luke as a beloved outsider who shared his gifts with others and accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys. Maybe Luke was more interested in learning and documenting his travel experiences than being warm and fuzzy. This is important because it is Luke who is giving a detailed account of what he had experienced and shared with others.

³¹ Wall, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 8.

³² W. Harold Mare, *New Testament Background Commentary: A New Dictionary of Words, Phrases and Situations in Bible Order* (Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 2004), 138.

³³ Elwell and Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 1361.

Literary Context

Marshall's comprehensive work on the book of Acts states that one possible answer to the literary work of Acts is that we should look upon Acts as falling into the category of the ancient historical novel or romance.³⁴ Elwell implies that Acts falls naturally into two parts, chapters 1 to 12 and 13 to 28. The first part contains the "acts of Peter" and part two is largely concerned with the "acts of Paul."³⁵

Powell inferred that of the many themes in the Book of Acts, Luke the narrator is deliberate about presenting God as sovereign over history: God determines what will happen, and all things that transpire do so with a strong sense of divine necessity. He also affirms that God offers people guidance through the Holy Spirit, prophets, angels, and visions.³⁶

Theological Interest

Bruce stated that,

On the theological side, the dominating theme of Acts is the activity of the Holy Spirit. The promise of the outpouring of the Spirit, made by the risen Christ in 1:4ff. is fulfilled for Jewish disciples in chapter 2, and for Gentile believers in chapter 10. The apostles discharge their commission in the power of the Spirit, which is manifested by supernatural signs; their converts' acceptance of the gospel is likewise attended by visible manifestations of the Spirit's power. The book might indeed be called 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit,' for it is the Spirit who controls the advance of the gospel throughout.³⁷

³⁴ I. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 18.

³⁵ Elwell and Beitzel, *Bakers Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 24.

³⁶ Mark Allan Powell, "Acts of the Apostles," ed. Mark Allan Powell, *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary, Revised and Updated* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2011), 11.

³⁷ F. F. Bruce, "The Book of Acts," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 12.

In chapter 10 verses 19-20, Luke left no room for the readers to assume who was initiating the transformation in the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles. Luke made it clear that it was God through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, while Peter was still trying to interpret and make sense of his vision—what God was saying to him and what God wanted him to do—the Spirit of God intervened. Johannes Louw’s definition of a vision is an “event in which something appears vividly and credibly to the mind, although not actually present, but implying the influence of some divine or supernatural power or agency.”³⁸ In the visionary experience, Peter refused to participate and eat what was unclean. God repeated Himself to Peter three times before He removed the vision from Peter’s spiritual eyes.

One is not clear if Peter was lost to what the vision meant, or if he was thinking about what it would mean to make Yahweh available to all races. What was clear is that he was in a meditative posture and seeking to understand what God required of him (Acts 10:17). One could only wonder if Peter was remembering the episode when he denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed (Mt 26:75). However, in this occurrence God spoke to Peter again without a visual sign and told him to get up and go downstairs to meet the three men whom God, through Cornelius, had sent to look for him (Acts 10:20).

Gangel highlighted that Luke used a technical Greek term to express the command to go without hesitation. This indicates unfettered obedience, which takes no time to fret over conscience.³⁹ Luke’s intention is for his readers to know who was

³⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1996), 444.

³⁹ Kenneth O. Gangel, “Acts,” *Holman New Testament Commentary*, vol. 5 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 161.

leading this mission and how important and urgent this assignment was. Peter was not the one who was in charge, God was. Gangel argues that in Acts, the voice of Jesus, angelic messengers and the prompting of the Holy Spirit all convey God's Word with equal power and authority.⁴⁰

According to verses 25-26, when Peter arrived to the home of Cornelius he was greeted and welcomed with respect. The acknowledgement that Cornelius extended to Peter by bowing at his feet could be construed as worship. Gangel states that in the East this way of showing respect was customary not only to kings, but to others occupying a superior station; but among the Greeks and Romans it was reserved for the gods.⁴¹ However, Peter was careful not to be treated as deity and kindly asks Cornelius to stand to his feet. Peter was fully aware that he was not there to be exalted, but he was there in obedience so that unity and reconciliation could take place.

Obedience and humility were the values that would best bring about the result that God intended in this mission assignment. Humility was permeating the lives of both of these God-fearing men. Desmond Alexander states that in scripture, a theocentric worldview controls the connotations, which refer primarily to submission to God. Such submission is the appropriate attitude before the divine majesty and is a necessary condition for accepting His grace.⁴² Fitzsimmonds declared that the importance of this virtue (humility) springs from the fact that it is found as part of the character of

⁴⁰ Gangel, *Holman New Testament Commentary*, 161.

⁴¹ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Acts 10:25.

⁴² T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

God.⁴³ Cornelius understood and respected the fact that Peter was an ambassador of God, and Peter understood that his position was one of service and not of being worshipped.

According to verses 27-29, Cornelius was anticipating something extraordinary to happen when Peter arrived, and as a result he invited his family members to share in whatever God was about to share with them through Peter. However, the narrator is still presenting Peter as walking in obedience to the Holy Spirit but skeptical to what his presence in the home of a Gentile would mean to his Jewish community and to those who were gathered. Peter had to address the awaiting crowd and put his presence with them in perspective. Therefore he said to them, “it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile” (Acts 10:28).

Peter’s statement reflected the prejudices that had emerged between the Jews and the Gentiles for centuries although there was no recorded law that made such a claim. However, Vincent alluded to the fact that the Jews professed to ground this prohibition on the Law of Moses, but there is no direct command in the Mosaic Law forbidding Jews to associate with those of other nations.⁴⁴ Polhill recorded that Peter wanted everyone present to realize how unacceptable it was for a Jew to associate closely or even visit in the home of a person of another race.⁴⁵ If one is to believe that such a Law existed and Peter was living in obedience to that law, then why did Peter not make this statement when Cornelius’ messengers visited him in Joppa? It was as if Peter were more accepting of the Gentiles visiting his domain, than for him to visit theirs. This egocentric practice

⁴³ F. S. Fitzsimmonds, “Humility,” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 491.

⁴⁴ Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1887), 501.

⁴⁵ Polhill, *The New American Commentary*, 258.

still exists in many white churches today; as Black attendance increase in white churches, the white members transfer their membership to other white churches.

It also addresses a deeper issue of superficially accepting Blacks as long as they are not in positions of power. And what has been consistent even to this day is that whites seldom join predominant Black churches. One could argue that it was for this reason, that the Holy Spirit sent Peter to Cornelius and did not send Cornelius to him. It is not surprising that Peter had to make it very clear that he was acting under the authority of a new directive given to him by the Holy Spirit in the form of a vision (v. 27).

A common thread that flows through the narrative was the presence of the Holy Spirit and His involvement in both of the men's lives through the form of visions. Luke's reporting of this narrative is intentional and strategic. Not only did both Cornelius and Peter receive visions that were intentional in bringing them together individually, religiously and ethnically, but Luke also recorded Cornelius' vision first while notably, Peter is the one who is sent to Cornelius' residence. This explanation could lead to the question of the chronology of Peter's vision. Crossley said that the most unfortunate thing about Peter's vision from the perspective of New Testament chronology is that it does not appear that Luke knows when it happened, particularly as Luke often gives us numerous historical references throughout Luke-Acts.⁴⁶

As one takes a closer look at Peter's vision, Crossley stated that the food laws were no longer valid and Peter was told to eat food prohibited in the Torah, something,

⁴⁶ James G. Crossley, "The Date of Mark's Gospel: Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity," vol. 266, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2004), 140.

which Peter claimed he had never before done.⁴⁷ Although Peter's vision primarily deals with the issue of clean and unclean foods, the wider implication given in Acts 10–11:18 is that God shows no partiality and accepts Gentiles.⁴⁸

Luke continues to make it clear that God was the initiator of the breaking down of the walls of division between the Jews and the Gentiles. Peter is open to see what God intends to do as he crosses the barriers that existed for so many years. Polhill observed that God had shown Peter that he should not call another person common or unclean as all were God's creatures and all were declared clean. God had led him to Cornelius, and God had declared Cornelius clean.⁴⁹

In verses 34–35, Gangel articulated that Luke understood the enormous impact of what he was about to write. In a few short sentences this brash disciple from Galilee, now a respected apostle from Jerusalem, would sweep away centuries of religious and racial prejudices.⁵⁰ Peter articulated, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality but in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him." Gangel went on to explain that no longer was God only for the Jews, and no longer was Jesus only a Messiah for Jews. Here comes a new theology of remnant Christians from all nations of the world.⁵¹ Maybe Gangel meant that Jesus was no longer only the Jewish Messiah from the lenses of the Jewish people, because scripture never indicated that God the Father was Jewish, or that God the incarnate, who came in the form of a man and took

⁴⁷ Crossley, "The Date of Mark's Gospel," 138–139.

⁴⁸ Crossley, "The Date of Mark's Gospel," 139.

⁴⁹ Polhill, *The New American Commentary*, 258.

⁵⁰ Gangel, *Holman New Testament Commentary*, 163.

⁵¹ Gangel, *Holman New Testament Commentary*, 163.

on the name of Jesus was the Messiah only of the Jews. Scripture informs us that whosoever believes on Him shall be saved (Jn 3:16).

Newman agrees with Peter's new viewpoint of human equality and shared that "God treats all men on the same basis" translates the Semitic idiom, "God is not one who receives men's faces." "To receive (someone's) face," means "to show partiality to someone" on the basis of external factors such as race, religion, or nationality."⁵² It will be folly to try to box God in and say that scripture does not reflect partiality (see introduction). However, what Peter is saying, is that God does not show partiality on the external factors which God has designed and ordained within His creation. However, Jamieson explained that "God has respect only to personal character and state in the acceptance of men; national and ecclesiastical distinctions being of no account."⁵³ Polhill shared that,

The Greek word used for favoritism (v. 34) is constructed on a Hebrew idiom meaning *to lift a face*. Peter saw that God does not discriminate on the basis of race or ethnic background, looking up to some and down on others. But God does discriminate between those whose behavior is acceptable and those whose attitude is not acceptable. Those who reverence God and practice what is right are acceptable to him (v. 35; cf. Lk 8:21).⁵⁴

Many scholars have taken notice of the conversion experience of Cornelius and his family, but one may wonder what transpired within Peter throughout this experience that made it different from Cornelius'. One may argue if Cornelius was converted, then Peter was converted, and if Peter was not converted, then Cornelius was not converted.

⁵² Newman and Nida, *A Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles*, 215.

⁵³ Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, Acts 10:34–35.

⁵⁴ Polhill, *The New American Commentary*, 260.

Elwell rightfully stated that,

Conversion is a total change in one's direction in life or moral orientation. For Christians this means a change from an orientation that does not take God into account to one in which the person is submitted to Christ. Conversion is the process of which repentance is the entrance and faith the new direction; the same Hebrew and Greek words may be translated either "repentance" or "conversion."⁵⁵

Blount posits that the understanding of Acts 10 as a conversion story is somewhat misleading in Cornelius' case as Cornelius had already accepted Israel's God as the only God and followed Jewish standards of pious conduct.⁵⁶ God did not need Peter to convert Cornelius, as He did not need Ananias to convert Saul. God was leading two God-fearing men from two different ethnic regions to carry out the plan that He had for the church.

Verses 44-46 say, "While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word." Lenski commented that before Peter could finish all he had to say, God himself finished the work which he had inaugurated and directed from the beginning.⁵⁷ Lenski continued to elaborate that God spoke in his own mighty way at this point by sending the Holy Spirit upon these Gentiles. The verb "fell" denotes the suddenness and also the descent from above.⁵⁸ Gangel wrote along similar lines when he said that,

Luke intended us to understand that Peter never finished his sermon. We read no invitation and no challenge to the listeners to respond in any way. Peter is hardly

⁵⁵ Elwell and Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 512.

⁵⁶ *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, 752.

⁵⁷ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 430.

⁵⁸ Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 430.

in here; God decided they had heard enough because he saw that in their hearts they trusted in the one of whom Peter had been speaking.⁵⁹

The Holy Spirit filled the room so that all present saw and experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. One would wonder if this was the first time that the six circumcised Jews who travelled with Peter had ever experienced such an outpouring of the Spirit of God. Luke the narrator continues to give the impression that Peter and his Jewish circumcised followers accompanied Peter to be transformed in their thinking. Luke is as intentional in keeping this transition as God-focused as he possibly could. God is leading this exercise because it is important that both the Jews and Gentiles understand this mission reality. Bruce's position is that this event was not so much a second Pentecost, standing alongside the first, as the participation of Gentile believers in the experience of the first Pentecost. What was involved was later summed up by Paul: "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks" (1 Cor 12:13).⁶⁰ Bruce's explanation is that,

The order of events differed markedly from that of the hearers on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. The hearers in Jerusalem were exhorted to repent and be baptized in order to receive the remission of sins and the gift of the Spirit. But the experience of the hearers in Caesarea reproduced rather than that of the original company of disciples in Jerusalem, on whom the Spirit descended suddenly.⁶¹

According to verses 47-48, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit was all that Peter needed to seal his earlier conviction, to clarify his vision, and to lead the church of Jesus Christ. His earlier comment now becomes clearer; "I truly understand that God shows no partiality" (v. 34b). Newman pointed out that Peter's statement that "these people have

⁵⁹ Gangel, *Holman New Testament Commentary*, 165.

⁶⁰ Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 216.

⁶¹ Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 216-217.

received the Holy Spirit, just as we also did” does not imply that he is identifying the speaking in foreign languages at Pentecost with the speaking of strange tongues here. What he is saying is that in both instances, God was obviously present.⁶² Polhill shared that the demonstration of the Spirit always serves a single purpose—to show that the advance in witness which comes directly from God is totally due to divine leading. This was especially important in this instance.⁶³ This witness is unique in that, before the church (both Jews and Gentiles believers) can continue to reach out to those whose sins are not forgiven they must first reconcile their cultural and religious differences among themselves. Luke the narrator is demonstrating that this necessary reconciliation can only be done through the work of the Holy Spirit.

There are different schools of thought on whether Peter baptized Cornelius’ household or if the travelling Jews from Joppa were ordered by Peter to carry out that sacrament function. Polhill said that it is interesting that Peter gave orders for them to be baptized.⁶⁴ However, Lenski argues that the aorist verbs and infinitives imply that what they speak of was done. We should note the passive, “that they be baptized,” and that Peter does not say, “to baptize them,” active.⁶⁵ He further argues that Peter “ordered that they be baptized” or “them to be baptized,” which means that he gave an order for water for the baptism.⁶⁶

⁶² Newman and Nida, *A Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles*, 220.

⁶³ Polhill, *The New American Commentary*, 264.

⁶⁴ Polhill, *The New American Commentary*, 264.

⁶⁵ Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 434.

⁶⁶ Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 435.

Lenski would further argue that baptism was the decisive act that admitted these Gentiles into the Christian church, directly from Gentilism, without first having to pass through Judaism.⁶⁷

What is baptism, and why is it so important in bridging the gap between these two diverse communities without them having to give up their cultural identity or be forced to embrace the other's cultural identity? Vincent pointed out that from this point on Luke distinguishes Christians into two classes—those of the circumcision and those of the uncircumcision; calling the former Jews, and the latter Gentiles or Greeks.⁶⁸

It was important for Cornelius and his house to be baptized, not only because Jesus was baptized and commands us to be baptized, but because baptism unites us as one with Christ. Lloyd-Jones declares that,

Baptism is a sign and seal of regeneration, of our union with Christ and of our receiving the Holy Spirit. Now, again, I say it is a sign and a seal. I do not become regenerate as I am baptized; I only have a right to be baptized because I am regenerate. Baptism tells me that I am regenerate; it certifies to me that I am born again, that I am united to Christ and that the Holy Spirit dwells in me. It is the sealing of that to me. It is God's way of giving me a pledge. As He gave the rainbow, and as He gave circumcision to the chosen race, so He gives us a sign and a seal of our regeneration in the act of baptism.⁶⁹

Lange concluded that Peter at once makes the practical application; if these men have received the Holy Ghost as well as we, that is, believers belonging to Israel (καθὼς καὶ ἡμεῖς), who then can refuse the water, so that they shall not be baptized?"⁷⁰ Peter's life is

⁶⁷ Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 435.

⁶⁸ Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 503–504.

⁶⁹ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 38–39.

⁷⁰ John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Acts* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 203.

changed, Gangel stated, what a radical breakthrough—Gentile equality with Jews in every way. Since Peter has already dined with Cornelius' three messengers, staying on with the centurion and his family for a few days no longer posed any problem for this liberated apostle.⁷¹

God through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit has begun the work of reconciliation between the Jews and the Gentiles for the advancement of the Gospel throughout the world. This study has brought to light that God is actively involved in His purpose for His creation, whether we as the church take the time and pay attention or not. Both passages have demonstrated the heart of God as a God who delights in wholesome and healthy relationship with God and humanity in spite of the differences that emerge overtime. It would be interesting to see our church explore what it means to embrace personhood and value relationships with others who are particularly different than we are. These realities would move us into changes where we may lose much control and power. As in the narrative of Acts, the others (Gentiles) may receive an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and then we may have no other choice but to include them as brothers and sisters of Christ in a genuine way.

⁷¹ Gangel, *Holman New Testament Commentary*, 166.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Wesleyan movement was birthed in America during the turmoil of slavery and the economic growth of the Industrial Revolution. Many factors influenced how the church lived out its Christian mission and how it addressed the social ills that slavery triggered in the church's formative years. However, amid its continued growth, the church experienced many fractures as a result of Blacks and slavery. The scope of this section will therefore be to follow the movement of Methodism through its transformation and examine how slavery and Blacks in general informed its development.

As a result of the leadership and spiritual awakening of John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield, the revival movement of the Wesleyan Tradition was launched in the Americas out of England during the mid-eighteenth century. Prior to the Americas, Wesley and his colleagues were strategic in sharing the Gospel to the increasing population of factory workers living in poverty and sub-standard labor conditions in England. It can also be said that Wesley and his clergy colleagues ministered to the increasingly wealthy business owners of the mills and factories.

Frederick A. Norwood made an important observation as it pertained to the similarities between the economic and social climate of Europe and America when he noted that,

Methodism was a social process as much as an ecclesiastical movement. In England the context was the Industrial Revolution. ...They got their start in iron

mines and coal pits. ...In the United States the context was similar. ...It was born in the noisy cradle of the factory and nurtured in the nursery of democracy. Iron, coal, steam power, freedom, individualism, and the rights of man provided a heady brew for the feeding of an infant denomination.¹

However, Norwood failed to mention the major influencer that fueled the Industrial Revolution; slavery. In using words such as power, freedom, individualism and rights in his comparative study, it became evident that Blacks as a people of worth were not factored into his analysis.

Most Blacks in America during this period were slaves, and slaves in America received the most inhumane treatment of any peoples in the history of human civilization. One would have to wonder if slaves were considered people of equal human standing or simply property, because Norwood's language was not inclusive of the plight of the Blacks' condition in his assessment of the similarities between the two countries.

Norwood and many other scholars have intentionally, or unintentionally, separated the social aspect of Methodism from its ecclesiastical movement, whereby they have found ways of justifying the coldhearted treatment of Black slaves in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries. The Industrial Revolution in both England and America endorsed slavery and sanctioned segregation within the United States and throughout the Methodist Church. Many colonists in the white church had more of an affinity for America than for Blacks. Norwood alluded to the affinity between the Methodist Church and America when he said, "the identification with ideas of American progress in the

¹ Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Nashville Press, 1991), 16.

early twentieth century all points to a close and continuing love affair, for better or worse, between the Methodist Church and the United States.”²

However, it must be noted that this so-call love affair did not prevent many white abolitionists, along with John Wesley, to oppose slavery. This polarization gives us a picture of how fractured the church was, and particularly the Methodist Church, on the issue of slavery. The spiritual revivalists within the church did not close their eyes entirely on this evil. Opposition to slavery was a prominent part of the Second Great Awakening, as leaders such as Charles Finney and Theodore Weld publicly denounced slavery.³ It was because of many white abolitionists within the church that glimpses of hope were offered, even though the hope of Blacks ran low and sometimes could not be seen with the naked eye. Nevertheless, white Christian Americans were at the forefront of the abolitionist movement and the efforts at evangelism among the Black slaves were some of the more positive expressions of Christianity in the time of slavery.⁴ Whites were not alone in this humanitarian emancipation; they were also Blacks, freed and slaved, who participated in the eradication of this complex evil.

With all its imperfections, the Methodist Church was having a positive impact wherever its people shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The holiness revival found its pre-eminent expression among Methodists, where it was sparked by the enthusiasm of a remarkable Black woman, Phoebe Palmer. This movement gained momentum through

² Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, 17.

³ Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, 293.

⁴ Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers), 583-604, Kindle Edition.

her evangelical tours and through the organizational efforts of the National Association for the Promotion of Holiness.⁵

There were also Black men and other women who played a vital role in the fight against slavery, and more importantly who spread spiritual holiness along the corridors of the North, South and the Midwest. The list is extensive and substantive to say the least. Some of these active Negro preachers include Richard Allen, Daniel Coker, Henry Evans, Absalom Jones, Christopher Rush, Abraham Thompson, and James Varick.⁶ There were many others who were nameless because of the conditions in which they served and most of them were not given the pulpit to preach in nor did they receive the approval to be ordained. However, they were endowed with natural ability and eloquence, they proclaimed a simple Bible-based gospel that moved and humbled Negroes and whites, male and female, slaves and free.⁷

Early Methodist history would not be complete if the person of Henry Hosier were not mentioned. Mr. Hosier was the first Negro preacher to establish a wide reputation in Methodism. Hosier was born a slave in North Carolina and was unable to read or write. However, his powerful evangelical preaching from New England to Maryland resulted in the conversion of many whites and Negroes. The New York Packet referred to Hosier as one of the most gifted preachers in the world.⁸ The prominence of Hosier that resulted from his gifted preaching shed a different light on the Negro from the

⁵ Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion In America*, Fourth Edition (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 320.

⁶ Grant S. Shockley, *The African American Presence in United Methodist* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 25.

⁷ Shockley, *The African American Presence in United Methodist*, 24.

⁸ Shockley, *The African American Presence in United Methodist*, 24-25.

white on-lookers even if they never verbalized their sentiments in the open. On one of the premiere stages of influence during the eighteenth century he was a Negro who brought tears from many eyes, and converted the hearts of men and women, Black and white. This platform gave whites a different perspective in which to view Blacks. Whether it influenced their perception of whether Blacks were inferior to whites, one would never know.

Hosier travelled extensively on circuits with Garrettson, Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury, Richard Whatcoat, Jesse Lee, and other appointees of John Wesley, and he should be included among the illustrious group of preachers/missionaries who conducted American Methodist work until the Christmas Conference of 1784.⁹ Shockley summed up the contribution of Hosier's impact on early Methodism best when he quoted the words of Bishop Coke: "Any story of the beginning of Methodism in America which does not give prominent place to Harry Hosier, familiarly called 'Black Harry,' is inadequate. Surely he deserves a place in Methodism's Hall of Fame."¹⁰

The creative tension that many of the early Methodists faced with slavery was the fact that the "economic progress" of America, which trickled down to the advancement for whites individually and collectively, was, in their opinion, contingent on Blacks remaining under their control as property.

The Methodist, therefore were forced to deal with the issue of slavery as they evangelized and incorporated Black slaves into the life of the church. William B. McClain referenced how the Methodist preachers delivered their message of repentance under the threat of damnation to the poor and disinherited, many of who were Blacks. He

⁹ Shockley, *The African American Presence in United Methodist*, 25.

¹⁰ Shockley, *The African American Presence in United Methodist*, 25.

further noted that their message of inner assurance of love was good news to the hard working, God-fearing, common people, who responded with enthusiastic emotionalism to Christianity.¹¹

Donald G. Matthews also acknowledged that Methodists had been especially determined to convert Blacks. He alluded to the fact that the Methodist Episcopal Church in most southern cities was a Black society with a few white members who had power and protected worshippers from hostile authorities.¹² One would have to wrestle with determining how the white Methodists defined the church, and what transpired in the worship experience of the church that did not trickle over to the social lives of the slaves. There were many conversations that took place as it related to the Christian Methodist's way of condoning slavery. However, a principle theological question that had to be answered was the question of whether or not slavery was classified as sin.

Norwood alluded to the fact that there was a deep-rooted conflict between the individual and the social aspects of sin as experienced in the local Methodist societies and classes.¹³ This conflict was theological and did not occur in a vacuum, but was steeped not only in the role of the slave in the success of the industrial revolution but also in the intrinsic perception that whites had of the value of the Black slave.

Donald G. Matthews shed some light on the perception that whites had of Blacks from Africa in sharing that:

¹¹ William B. McClain, *Black People in the Methodist Church: Whither Thou Goest?* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1984), 2-3.

¹² Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the South: Chicago History of American Religion* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 136.

¹³ Norwood, *The Story of American Methodist*, 201.

Whites approached their assumptions from two positions. They believed that from one end of the spectrum, Blacks were innately inferior to whites because they were a race distinct from humanity, a condition that could never be changed. And at the other end of the spectrum they believed that Blacks were not innately inferior to whites, they were simply culturally defective barbarians who had to be civilized.¹⁴

Both of these positions would bear true in the ways that many white Methodists treated and embraced many Blacks even after the same spirit converted them into the family of Christ. One may ask, “what was it about Blacks that evoked this reaction in white European Americans? Was it merely the color of their skin or was it their culture, which was expressed, in a different manner than white America? Or ultimately, was it possible that whites did not believe that Blacks were created in the image of God?”

Whatever motivated some Methodist preachers and laypersons to continue to own slaves, and others to mistreat them, will continue to be a mystery throughout every generation. However, what continues to offer hope was the reoccurring truth that many Christian whites and Blacks believed that slavery was evil, and hence sinful. William B. McClain forcefully gave his theological position on slavery when he said that racism is not merely a moral error, an error in judgment, or a social aberration: it is sin because it divides the human family and blurs the image of God in persons.¹⁵

What made this issue of slavery even more complex was the position of some Methodist leaders, bishops, and pastors who owned slaves but did not believe that the slaves should be treated inhumanely. Donald G. Matthews uplifted this position when he cited a quotation from a slave owner, James Furman, which said, “We who own slaves,

¹⁴ Matthews, *Religion in the South*, 171.

¹⁵ McClain, *Black People in the Methodist Church*, 102.

honor God's law in the exercise of our authority."¹⁶ This sanctioning of slavery with good intentions still leaves us to question, what would have been the destiny of Blacks if slavery were to continue, and by whose standards was it determined if a slave was being treated humanely or inhumanely? This position of James Furman and many other preachers and Christian slave-owners lacks the personal responsibility to see Blacks as equal in the sight of God and humanity. However, these and similar prevailing mindsets motivated the Methodists to bring Blacks into their fellowship without seeking justice for their freedoms. It is worth noting that the Methodist church failed to reconcile the social and civil liberation of Blacks with spiritual transformation.

John Wesley and George Whitefield's Position on Slavery

John Wesley and George Whitefield were two of the major clergy forerunners in the Methodist movement during the eighteenth century. It is important to understand how these two pioneers of the Methodist movement responded to the issues of slavery, and to ascertain how and if their personal positions, positive or negative, impacted the direction of the Methodist Church as it related to the treatment and inclusion of Blacks in the life of the church.

Wesley was no stranger to slavery, and there is no recorded documentation that indicated that he supported or condoned slavery in any form. Wesley put his stamp of disapproval against slavery in 1743 when he stated in the *General Rules* that he had prohibited "the buying or selling of the bodies and souls of men, women, and children,

¹⁶ Mathews, *Religion in the South*, 136.

with the intention to enslave them.”¹⁷ James S. Thomas stated that John Wesley became more and more convinced that slavery was a social evil that could not be tolerated. He was so moved by his convictions that in 1773, at the age of seventy, he sent a preliminary draft of his tract “Thoughts upon Slavery” to a friend, and a year later the tract was published.¹⁸ McClain cited that many historians have assessed this pamphlet as the most far-reaching treatise ever written against slavery.¹⁹

Wesley was neither alone nor passive in his conviction of slavery: Young Hwi Yoon was resolute as he mentioned that it was the Moravians who affected Wesley’s early antislavery sentiment of slavery.²⁰ It was their practices towards people in general that had a major impact in how Wesley ministered to the poor and indigent. Yoon and other scholars agreed that,

The Moravian message of universal fellowship had a compelling power to weaken racial prejudice against the enslaved African. They had an ideal of Christian fellowship “in love united,” in spite of “differences of intellect and intelligence, of thought, opinion, taste and outlook”; this fellowship meant “not only a bridging of theological differences but also of social differences.”²¹

It was this strong transformation towards all people by the Moravians that impacted and influenced Wesley’s ministry towards slaves and people as a whole.

William B. McClain also reported that Wesley had an opportunity to personally witness slavery both in the colony of Georgia and South Carolina, and those experiences

¹⁷ McClain, *Black People in the Methodist Church*, 10.

¹⁸ James S. Thomas, *Methodism’s Racial Dilemma, The Story of the Central Jurisdiction* (Nashville, TN: Nashville Press), 14.

¹⁹ McClain, *Black People in the Methodist Church*, 12.

²⁰ Young Hwi Yoon, “The spread of antislavery sentiment through proslavery tracts in the transatlantic evangelical community, 1740s-1770s,” *Church History* 81, no. 2 (June 1, 2012): 354. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed April 17, 2014.

²¹ Yoon, “The spread of antislavery,” 353.

also influenced him to become zealously engaged in the study of Blacks in Africa and the slave trade upon his return to England.²² In the same vein, Gordon L. Heath wrote that it might be too much to say that a lack of interest in the past is an indication of a lack of love for others, but it is probably fair to say that it is difficult to grow in love for others without knowing their past.²³ Wesley's life demonstrated a love of God and humanity that was exemplified in the way he lived his life and in the way he prioritized his life. His study of the life of Blacks in Africa and how they were treated during the slave trade deepened his resolve to fight against the injustice of slavery. Whether his research transferred into a deeper love for Blacks, or whether it simply motivated him to fight against the inhumane treatment that was being enforced upon them, remains unclear. What was evident in his behavior and life's work was that he knew that Blacks were created in the image of God, and he was committed to eradicate slavery from England and the Americas. Wesley in many ways lived out this personal spiritual conviction towards everyone, including the Black slaves from Africa.

There is no better time than at this juncture to interject that the church did not have the power to change public policy, or to put a halt to slavery or the slave trade. The church and its preachers of the Gospel could only use moral suasion by their interpretation of the scriptures to persuade those in positions of power to exercise what was morally right. Therefore, the last letter that Wesley ever wrote, and perhaps his most famous, was addressed to William Wilberforce the antislavery fighter, who was a

²² McClain, *Black People in the Methodist Church*, 9-10.

²³ Gordon L. Heath, *Doing Church History A User-friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity* (Toronto, Canada: Clements Publishing, 2008), 22.

member of Parliament, and later became the Prime Minister of England. Wesley's letter was to encourage Wilberforce to fight against the enslavement of human beings.²⁴

George Whitefield's experience with slavery was more involved and hence more complicated than that of Wesley's. Whitefield lived in Georgia for many years during American slavery, and his life was shaped by the experiences that he encountered firsthand. Frederick A. Norwood acknowledged that George Whitefield's appearance on the American scene on November 2, 1739 was the igniting spiritual force that impacted the Great Awaken,²⁵ and hence, the growth of the Methodist Church. They are mixed views on George Whitefield's position on slavery and they vacillate depending on the scholar's slant and interpretation of his or her position. However, Anthony Benezet's account of Whitefield's position on slavery as reported by Irv Brendliners notes that Benezet and Whitefield were close friends and engaged in conversations on slavery; Benezet writes:

Early on, 1739, Whitefield was opposed to slavery and expressed that opposition in a published letter to the inhabitants of Virginia, Maryland, and both Carolinas. However, the next twelve years in Georgia changed his position. He struggled to make ends meet at the orphanage, Bethesda. He believed the 640 acres on which the orphanage was located should be able to support it, but the hot climate made that an overwhelming task. He eventually began to think that white persons were not capable of intense labor in such heat, but Black persons were. Further, having slaves whom he could treat lovingly would add the other providential benefit, evangelization of these slaves. After Georgia's prohibition of slavery was rescinded, Whitefield and Bethesda owned fifty slaves.²⁶

²⁴ McClain, *Black People in the Methodist Church*, 13.

²⁵ Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, 63-64.

²⁶ Irv Brendlinger, "John Wesley and slavery: myth and reality," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 41, no. 1 (March 1, 2006): 233. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed April 17, 2014.

Norwood shared that God ordained Whitefield's arrival to America,²⁷ and hence his moral actions and theological beliefs as they pertained to slavery, mattered. It is because of Whitefield's love for God and humanity that challenges us not to oversimplify the complexity that slavery played during the Industrial Revolution, and the positions that those in church leadership took. However, in lieu of the complexities of slavery, it is important to lend voice to one's beliefs of Whitefield's perception of the Blacks from Africa.

Looking from the outside, one could easily assume that Whitefield genuinely viewed Blacks as inferior to his white race, although they were physically superior. Whether Whitefield's sincere position on Blacks is sinful or not will vary with respect to how that individual chooses to interpret scripture. There is no evidence to view Whitefield as a less than authentic Christian; furthermore, there is ample evidence that demonstrated his love for God and for his fellowmen, both white and Black alike.

What is more important in this discourse is the need to uncover Whitefield's philosophy on why he believed that he could own Blacks as slaves, and at the same time, treat them lovingly. This oxymoronic viewpoint becomes problematic because the mere definition of slave connotes property and not humanity, inferiority over equality, subordination over relationship, and poverty not prosperity. The life of the slave was to serve their master for the duration of their earthly life. For Whitefield to believe that he could treat his slaves lovingly suggests that his perception of them was substandard. Whitefield, like most Christian influencers of his day, was unable to reconcile the spiritual lives of Blacks with their freedom, justice and social progress.

²⁷ Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, 63.

Wesley and Whitefield shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ in an authentic way, yet they had different beliefs on slavery. It is difficult to ascertain if the actions of these two pioneers of Methodism negatively impacted slavery. The consensus appears however, that both of them could be positively viewed as lovers of all peoples.

The Early Methodist Position On Slavery

Wesley's influence against slavery was impactful, at least within the early formation of the American Methodist Church. The first official action against slavery was taken in 1780, at the Baltimore Conference of Methodist Society.²⁸ This was a pivotal advancement against slavery within Methodism because many of the preachers who were in attendance and casted a vote were individuals who owned slaves. McClain indicated that Francis Asbury was the supervisor of the meeting and "Question Seventeen was included which stated: Does this conference acknowledge that slavery is contrary to the law of God, man and nature and hurtful to society?" And the assembly answered with a "Yes!"²⁹ Slavery was for the first time documented as a "moral sin." One could sense the language of schism lurking on the horizons, as Christian principles were challenging and interfering with individual Christians' secular way of life. The issue of slavery was no simple matter, and there were no guarantees that those who voted to denounce slavery as a moral sin owned any slaves during that period. However, there was a sense that the Holy Spirit was penetrating the hearts of individuals and many individuals' consciences were being altered.

²⁸ McClain, *Black People in the Methodist Church*, 55.

²⁹ McClain, *Black People in the Methodist Church*, 55.

In the spring of the following year, Question Sixteen was introduced in order to accomplish question Seventeen. This question according to McClain would impact the travelling preachers. The question was: “Ought not this conference require those travelling preachers who hold slaves to give a promise to set them free?” The answer again was “Yes!”³⁰ This decision proved positive in the life of the Methodist Church. The church was positioned to make a stance against the pressures of society that had already taken root within many Christians within the church.

The preachers who held slaves were placed in a very difficult position. For many of them the church had taken a stance in which they were not necessarily in agreement, but more importantly, it impacted their livelihood. It is safe to say that when decisions are made that negatively impact key individuals of power one must wait and see how the implementation of these previous decisions plays out as time moves on, and how the power and influence of the impacted individuals weigh in on those who are trying to implement change.

In 1784, the Methodist Church came into being at the now famous Christmas Conference at Lovely Lane Chapel, Baltimore.³¹ It was at this Conference that all Methodists were required to embark upon a procedure whereby any slaves they held would be emancipated. Those who refused were to be excluded from the church and no new persons who held slaves were to be admitted to membership in the church.³² This anti-slavery position of excluding white Christian slave owners from the church for the purpose of them owning slaves was a bold step that was unable to sustain itself for more

³⁰ McClain, *Black People in the Methodist Church*, 56.

³¹ McClain, *Black People in the Methodist Church*, 56.

³² McClain, *Black People in the Methodist Church*, 57.

than six months. The notion of excluding whites for the inclusion of slaves was a good intention that could never be realized in the Methodist Church or in any of the thirteen colonies in the Americas.

Therefore, on June 1, 1785, the church arrived at a significant compromise. The rules of the Christmas Conference in 1784 were applied only as far as they were consistent with the laws of the states in which the members resided.³³ In other words, the Methodist Church washed their hands of the issue of slavery, and placed the wellbeing of Blacks into the hands of the system that enforced slavery upon them in the first place. Viewed from another angle, the church placed the theological issue of sin into the hands of the states.

The Methodist Church once again had lost its moral integrity, whereas, Blacks had lost their hope in the church that preached the Gospel of love, unity and justice for all of humanity. This decision of the Methodist Church was reminiscent of Pilate washing his hands with water as a sign of his innocence as it pertained to Jesus's crucifixion because he was not prepared to take a stand against those who were about to start a riot (Mt 27:24). What would have made spiritual men of God close their eyes to such inhumane treatment of other human beings? It is worth noting that one cannot be sure if the Christian slave-owners believed that they as owners were treating the slaves inhumanely. If the majority of the Christian slave owners had a similar theological or ideological position as George Whitefield, they too would say that "having slaves whom

³³ McClain, *Black People in the Methodist Church*, 58.

we could treat lovingly would add the other providential benefit; evangelization of these slaves.”³⁴

The continual struggle with the issue of slavery continued to plague the Methodist Church as some progress was being made over the issue of slaves. However, at the 1884 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church the church experienced a resurfacing of tension over slavery.³⁵ The tension surfaced around some members of the Conference who still owned slaves, which were in opposition of the standing rules. An official break along sectional lines took place in May 1845 when the Southern delegates met in Louisville, Kentucky, and organized the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.³⁶

Treatment of Blacks within the Methodist Episcopal Church

Unfortunately, the newly formed Methodist Episcopal Church took no steps to curtail patterns of segregation that were developing increasingly within the ranks.³⁷ The reason for this treatment could be attributed to the fact that if white slave-owners gave Blacks special privileges in the church it could have complicated their Blacks role within the more prominent arena of the workforce. It was as if the American social system was based on practical methodologies of how slaves should be treated while the church only focused on personal spirituality. The revival that began with whites and Blacks singing, praying and fellowshiping within the same societies became much more intentionally segregated. Throughout the North and South, Methodist churches began to introduce and

³⁴ Brendlinger, "John Wesley and slavery," 233.

³⁵ Shockley, *Heritage & Hope The African American Presence*, 37.

³⁶ Shockley, *Heritage & Hope The African American Presence*, 37.

³⁷ Shockley, *Heritage & Hope The African American Presence*, 29.

implement separate galleries, nigger pews, and African corners.³⁸ The separation and distinctions between Blacks and whites in the church became more pronounced.

Shockley made mention to the fact that the end of the Civil War abruptly changed the civil status of African Americans, though it scarcely effected their social location. The church was therefore faced with the problem of redefining its social policy for a Black minority who were now citizens instead of slaves.³⁹ Shockley's argument would be valid only if the Methodist Church on June 1, 1785, had not voted on a compromise to follow the direction of the individual states on their position of slavery. But the church did vote to follow the direction of the state's position on slavery; therefore, at the end of the war, which emancipated the slaves, the Methodist Church should have been celebrating and excited for the freedom of Blacks, but again the church was not. The integrity of the Methodist as it pertains to how they view Blacks must therefore continue to be in question. The church should not have been faced with a problem at this juncture; the church should have been leading the world on how to treat the freed slaves as equals and people of worth.

The segregated treatment of the white Methodists forced the Black evangelists to leave the segregated galleries of the white man's churches and find dignity and spiritual comfort in a church of their own; an African church.⁴⁰ It was expected that Blacks would exercise their own freedoms by becoming a part of the Africanization movement, symbolized by the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and the AME Zion churches.⁴¹

³⁸ Shockley, *Heritage & Hope The African American Presence*, 29.

³⁹ Shockley, *Heritage & Hope The African American Presence*, 16.

⁴⁰ Shockley, *Heritage & Hope The African American Presence*, 16.

⁴¹ Shockley, *Heritage & Hope The African American Presence*, 16.

This long awaited symbolic freedom gave Blacks an opportunity to have control over where and how they worship. It also gave them some level of autonomy and pride to make decisions on their own and learn how to grow and develop as a people. The Methodist Church had a membership of approximately 207,000 Blacks and by the end of the Civil War there were only 78,782 African Americans left in the Methodist Episcopal, South.⁴²

Free Blacks Stay Within The Methodist Church After The War

The idea of free Black men, women and children staying in the segregated state of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, when they were free to leave, is cause for a more psychological analysis than physical. Shockley gave some reasons why they stayed when he indicated that those free Blacks who were loyal to their denomination chose to make their witness where they were, and their stance was as much an option to freedom as the option to leave.⁴³ Shockley also stated, “the Blacks had a vision of a church that would in time transcend the accidents of race and the ephemerality of station.”⁴⁴

One must agree that Shockley’s positions sound more contemporary than historic, and the language is more rhetorical than practical. It is true that Blacks were no longer necessarily slaves, but for sure they were not free, and they were not viewed or treated as equals. They were not free to sit where they wanted to sit, they were not free to lead if they had the abilities to lead, and they were not free to voice their opinions. Therefore, we can agree that the Black Methodists who stayed in the Methodist Episcopal church

⁴² Shockley, *Heritage & Hope The African American Presence*, 16-17.

⁴³ Shockley, *Heritage & Hope The African American Presence*, 19.

⁴⁴ Shockley, *Heritage & Hope The African American Presence*, 19.

had the right to stay, as they did, but they were not free to be who they wanted to be.

Secondly, it would be farfetched to say that the reason why the Blacks stayed during that period was to bring about equality and a multi-racial harmony within the Methodist Church.

As the reasons why the freed Blacks stayed within the Methodist Episcopal Church elude many historians, one should consider the emotional trauma that Blacks endured during that period. The Black slaves were dismantled of their African Culture, and in particular their language. This degrading of their personhood and the dehumanizing of their intellect were instrumental in destroying their self-esteem and confidence. The white master created fear in the Black slaves that were primarily imposed by inflicting physical pain when they disobeyed their white masters. If the question is asked, “why did the slaves stay in the white Methodist Church even after they were free Blacks, at the backdrop of the consistent inhumane treatment of whites?” the answer may vary. Many Blacks may have wondered if they could make it on their own without their whites master’s support or control. There may even have been a confidence issue with respect to the leadership of the African Black who could have been perceived to be making emotional decisions to leave the Mother Church. The more we try to pry into the reasons why the Blacks stayed, the more the reasons become complicated.

Did the Methodist Episcopal Church Want the Blacks to Stay?

Lincoln suggested that the staying of the Blacks within the Methodist Episcopal church took on an interesting patina that could hardly have been anticipated, and created

a church within a church.⁴⁵ This segregation and separation that continued within the church because of the ills of slavery led to many more Blacks leaving the church. However, when the Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church finally reunited in 1939 it was a momentous merger. However, this merger unified the Methodist whites but placed the Blacks in a separate conference called the Central Conference. Karen Y. Collier pointed out that most church historians have since agreed that the origin and development of the Central Jurisdiction was racist and that it represented segregation.⁴⁶

The Methodist Church continued to make minor to medium strides towards the acceptance of Blacks as equals, and up to the present day the United Methodist Church is still segregated and polarized on issues surrounding race.

Temple Terrace United Methodist Church (TTUMC) did not choose its current Black senior pastor. The Resident Bishop appointed the current pastor because the culture and demographics surrounding the church became Black and economically challenged. Although many of the current white members stayed, many left and fewer and fewer affluent or educated whites joined the church. At the same time, there is a gradual increase of Blacks and other minorities who are currently attending the worship experience. These minorities are not involved in leadership and few come during the week to participate in Bible Study or other committee meetings.

There is a tension that permeates the church whenever the Black senior pastor mentions race or diversity, and this tension resonates among all of the races that are

⁴⁵ Shockley, *Heritage & Hope The African American Presence*, 16.

⁴⁶ Shockley, *Heritage & Hope The African American Presence*, 99.

present. It is surprising that even the minorities do not want to confront the issue of race, racism or race intolerance. However, slavery has created many other problems as it pertains to Blacks, and whereas the Blackness of the African's skin is the most pronounced, Cornel West prophetically cited that the fundamental crisis in Black America is twofold: too much poverty and too little self-love.⁴⁷ These issues of Blackness—lack of European intellect and African culture were some of the reasons whites mistreated Blacks in the sixteen through the nineteenth centuries. Now the ills of slavery have resulted in poverty and little self-love among Blacks, and whites are having a difficult time relating of genuinely connecting, primarily to that population of the Black community.

TTUMC would first have to overcome their guilt of slavery in America and create a safe space for dialogue and education on the subject from both perspectives and seek to become comfortable at some level with the sins of our past. It is with the admission of our sins that we are able to forgive and begin the process of reconciliation.

⁴⁷ Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press), 63.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Diversity is the hallmark of God's creation. Evidence of this is seen and expressed in the creation of the sun and the moon; the hills and the valleys; the array of animals that roams the land; the birds that inhabit the air and the fishes that occupy the sea. They all seem to coexist in harmonious rhythm as if their created environment was flawless. However, at a micro level, the lion kills the deer, the shark kills the dolphin, some octopus kills the shark, and humans kill all kinds of animals for food and pleasure. Yet to many, the animal kingdom cohabits in harmony.

If God in His wisdom created incongruous harmony in His lesser creations, why is humanity held to a higher standard; or are they? Can humanity in its diversity dance to a harmonious beat without violence and wars; hatred and strife, and the notion of superiority and inferiority?

The Bible addresses issues of diversity, not only in nature and human beings, but also in terms of how God defines the body of Christ on earth—the Church. A biblical understanding of diversity is grounded in the understanding of diversity-in-unity. From the Bible, we understand that diversity imbedded and inherent in creation was never intended to be out of harmony. In Genesis 1, the author records God's declaration, "let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.... So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God He created them, male and female He created them"

(vv. 26-27). It is in the image and likeness of God that we reflect not only who God is, but also what God represents.

If we take the position that we are a reflection of God, then a valid question would be, what transpired during the course of time that created such discord and made diversity such a complex phenomenon? A simplistic answer could be sin; however, others may wonder if there is a correlation between Genesis 11 and the disunity that exists among people and races. The Bible recorded, when the whole world had one language they did not want to be scattered over the face of the earth. The people decided to build a tower called Babel, to reach heaven. When God realized what the people were doing, God came down and confused their language so that they would not understand each other, and God scattered them over the face of the whole earth (Gn 11: 1-9).

Even with the intentional scattering of people over the earth, the question still remains, was it God's intention to create racial diversity, or did humanity evolve into something that God did not intend? Are the image and likeness of God as revealed in Genesis 1 a reference to physical characteristics, or were they internal and spiritual? A defining question that may help further the conversation on this subject would be, what defines humanity in the sight of God? Is it our race, culture, or our identity in God? David Watson wrestled with this complex issue when he said that we must be mindful that the ways in which Christians understand humanity will likely come into conflict with some broader understanding of humankind.

Christian anthropology is an explicitly theological position; one informed more by different ideas and sources of knowledge (including divine revelation) than by a non-

Christian concept of humanity.¹ It is on the backdrop of these complicated views of humanity that this paper will attempt to create theological conversation on the nature of the church as it addresses the subject of unity in the midst of racial diversity. It will engage theologians in a conversation on ecclesiology, with an emphasis on *koinonia*, which is communion, i.e. joint participation within the body of Christ. It will then scrutinize the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist through the lens of unity and diversity and examine their role in celebrating oneness in Christ through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

According to Karl Barth, ecclesiology is centered upon the image of the church as the body of Christ. Barth does not see this image as simply symbolic or metaphorical, but as an ontic description of the church's true nature and reality.² By ontic, Barth sees the church as possessing the character of being real and present. Barth's usage of the metaphor Body of Christ to define the church suggests that he acknowledges the diversity that is operating within the oneness of the Body. However, he rejects the notion that the church is invisible, labeling this view as ecclesiological Docetism. Rather than viewing the church as a single institutional structure, he views the local congregation as the visible form of church.³

John Calvin agrees with Barth that the church is primarily a visible community. His constant emphasis on the public appropriation of the sacrament, especially of

¹ David Watson, "What Is A Human Being," accessed August 26, 2014, <http://davidfwatson.Me/2014/12/26/what-is-a-human-being-the-answer-really-does-matter/>.

² Kimlyn J. Bender, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Church In Contemporary Anglo-American Ecclesiology Conversation," *Zeitschrift Fur Dialektische Theologie* 21, no.1 (January 1, 2005): 84-116. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost, accessed August 26, 2014, 84.

³ Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology, Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 57.

baptism, was the motif upon which he defined and emphasized the visible side of the church.⁴ Calvin considered the church to be essential to the lives of Christians; however, those baptized were not necessarily composed of the elect. Calvin would further say that the outward actions of the Christians are not intended to contribute to their sanctification.⁵

Considering the church as a visible community does not lessen the role of the Spirit of God who called the church into being. However, Calvin and Augustine would agree that in spite of the invisible calling of the church into being by the Holy Spirit it does not negate the fact that it is the visible church that is a means for salvation.⁶ All the more, it is within this diverse visible assembly which is called the church that we seek to understand the will of God for fallen humanity, and the church's role in reaching a pluralistic world.

The New Testament word for church, *ekklesia*, reveals a communal connotation since the term signifies being called together by God to form an assembly of His chosen people.⁷ Hence, the church's formation was not derived from human intentions or innovation, but as a direct result of God's divine and mysterious appointment (1 Cor 1:2). From the very beginning, the church was understood to be a communal organism with God being the one responsible for gathering His people in order to communicate to them

⁴ Karkkainen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 51.

⁵ Don Thorsen, *Calvin vs. Wesley: Bringing Belief in Line with Practice* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 91.

⁶ Thorsen, *Calvin vs Wesley*, 91.

⁷ Thorsen, *Calvin vs Wesley*, 55.

that He was, and had.⁸ Whereas in Genesis 11 God made it impossible for the people to understand each other and scattered them, we see in Acts 2 that God brought them back together at Pentecost and made it possible for each person to hear their own language being spoken (vs. 1-12). We can infer from this event that God desires to once again bring about unity in the midst of diversity. God calls individuals into an assembly that represents God, then that assembled community would not only be free of contention and strife, but it would live in unity and harmony with each other as instructed by the Apostle Paul: “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Rom 12:5).

This spiritual reality was lived out in some communities that experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. One of the most powerful signs of Christ’s resurrection in the early Church is the profound unity experienced among the disciples: “Now the whole group of those who believed was of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32).⁹ John B. Polhill correctly articulated that the overarching concept was their unity, their being “one in heart, and mind” and their fellowship in the Spirit.¹⁰ It would appear that for a moment, or a season, the new assembled community was able to lay aside the obstacles that divided them and fellowship in the Spirit. This fellowship in the Spirit was manifested in social and economic action. Luke reported that: “Now the whole group of those who

⁸ Thorsen, *Calvin vs Wesley*, 55.

⁹ Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, “Practicing Koinōnia,” *Theology Today* 66, no. 3 (October 1, 2009): 346-367, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed October 21, 2014, 346.

¹⁰ John B. Polhill, “Acts,” *The New American Commentary*, vol. 26 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 151.

believed was of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common” (Acts 4:32).

Wallace M. Alston would refer to the relational behavior that was exemplified among the converted believers of the visible church as *koinonia*. For Alston, the concept *koinonia* describes the very nature of the church. Translated as fellowship or community, *koinonia* describes the relationship Christians have with God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, one another, the gospel, God’s plan to save the Gentiles and the mission of the church.¹¹ However, an examination of the experience of Acts 2:42 in relation to other relational experiences which occurred in the early church concerning the issue of unity would create interesting theological reflection. The Acts 2:42 occurrence could undoubtedly give rise to the question, “Was the unifying experience in the upper room attributed to the fact that they were all Jews together in one place, or would the power of the Holy Spirit have operated in spite of their unified ethnicity?” The answer to this question could better help us to understand the role of the Holy Spirit in celebrating unity in the midst of diversity. Notwithstanding that in Acts 10, when Peter was at Cornelius’ house preaching about Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit descended and filled the entire Gentile household (Acts 10:44). Peter had earlier shared with Cornelius that he was learning that God doesn’t show partiality to one group of people over another (Acts 10:34).

Embracing racial diversity in the church has been an interesting dynamic, as God the incarnate, in Jesus Christ, has laid the foundation for the necessity of being in

¹¹ Wallace M. Alston, *The Church of the Living God: A Reformed Perspective* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

authentic fellowship with each other regardless and inclusive of race. It was the Apostle Paul that wrote:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor 12:12-13).

In the minds of many minorities, this oneness in Christ is illusive. It is illusory primarily because the Greeks and the slaves in too many cases experience a perpetual duplicity in what is lived out in the spiritual contours of the church, in contrast to their experiences in the social and economic arenas of society. It is for this reason that the subject of unity in the church must be well defined in order for true believers to understand what it means to live in harmony with each other in a world of increasing otherness. It would be useful to determine whether interracial unity exists only on a spiritual level or if it trickles down to the socioeconomic and political dimensions of everyone's day to day lives as exemplified in Acts 4:32.

Biblical professor David Rhoads summed up the miracle of the first-century church stating, "The early Christian movement meant nothing less than breaking down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles."¹² He further gave a geographical picture of the cultural terrains through which the gospel would have to travel, and the need for it to be embraced by all peoples in order for the mission of Christ to be fulfilled. He shared

Across the ancient Mediterranean world, there was an incredible array of local ethnic communities, subcultures, and language groups within the aegis of the Roman Empire. The region around the Mediterranean Sea was multilingual, multiracial, and multiethnic, with many different religions and philosophies. These Jewish groups and Gentile nations comprised the multiplicity of cultures

¹² Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation As an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003-04-22), 21-22. Kindle Edition.

that Christianity sought to address and to embrace. In this multicultural arena, the diversity of early Christianity took shape.¹³

The expansion of the church into the world was not a Jewish initiative, but a divine mandate (Mt 28:18-20). Furthermore, it was within this multicultural world that the gospel was to be preached and koinonia was to be lived out. It was within the creative tension of differences that unity was to emerge in order for the Gospel of Jesus Christ to impact the world.

This would not be a simple process of the assimilation of minority cultures into the dominant culture, but a re-ordering of old and new structures for something new to emerge. Veli-Matti Karkkainen was convinced that if the church is the church of Christ, and since there is only one Christ, then unity must be the nature of the church.¹⁴ He further declared that the unity of the church is not primarily a human effort but rather is given from God, and as such, is mandatory for all Christians.¹⁵ Miroslav Volf would say that forgiveness would be the necessary vehicle to bring about Christian unity. He would argue that Christians could not simply sweep the ills of racial oppression under the rug, and contends that forgiveness was necessary, but he was not sure if it would suffice.¹⁶

A spiritual mandate sent church leaders in search of a solution to unify the church. The ecumenical movement has wrestled with division among the churches and in many ways has proven that their efforts to bring unity have fallen short of expectations. One of the many misunderstandings and reservations that Karkkainen cited about the nature of

¹³ DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey, and Kim, *United by Faith*, 21-22.

¹⁴ Veli-Matti, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 79.

¹⁵ Veli-Matti, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 79.

¹⁶ Miroslav, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 125-126.

the desired unity is that some people believe that the one church of Christ has already reached the visible realization of unity, at least in their own church, and therefore the unity sought is rather in the form of reuniting separated churches.¹⁷ This may be a valid observation in homogeneous settings, but this is far from the truth when we examine cultures where Blacks are worshipping. A good yardstick to measure unity in the church where Blacks are in attendance should not be the number of Black individuals who attend the church, but rather the proportionate number of Blacks who are in positions of leadership. This is because increasing the numbers of Blacks in worship without creating opportunities for leadership has the tendency to foster assimilation whereas, placing Blacks in some leadership positions creates opportunities for creativity, influence and belonging.

It is interesting to note that much research and reflection is placed on unity among the global church, but very little conversation has taken place among the majority cultures concerning how to close the divide as it relates to race relations among minority groups within their individual churches. Our current interracial reality points to the assumption that as a result of our fallen condition it is unlikely that we will see the complete living out of koinonia until the fullness of time.¹⁸

Koinonia is no small order for the church; it essentially signifies the church's intimate unity with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as well as an indissoluble relationship between humanity as well.¹⁹ Philip Kariatlis indicated,

¹⁷ Veli-Matti, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 85.

¹⁸ Hunsinger, "Practicing Koinōnia," 348.

¹⁹ Philip Kariatlis, "Affirming Koinonia Ecclesiology: An Orthodox Perspective," *Phronema* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 51-65. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed October 21, 2014, 53.

The communal dimension of the first Christian community is specially captured by the author of Acts in his use of the term *homothymadon* (Acts 2:46). Essentially, *homothymadon* signifies a profound harmonious unity, which, when applied to the ecclesial assembly, implied their unbreakable solidarity since they were all of one mind and unanimous desire.²⁰

However, in spite of a few isolated experiences that occurred in the early church, Curtiss Paul DeYoung documented that the first-century church struggled to keep its Christ-inspired unity movement intact in the midst of such wide diversity. The idea that Gentiles and Jews could or should worship and socialize together in the same congregation was foreign to the worldview of most people.²¹ DeYoung further articulated that there are many challenges in crossing this cultural divide²² as it appears that the interracial differences are insurmountable obstacles to overcome even with the mandate and assistance of the Holy Spirit. It is as if the idea of interracial unity requires too much from the elite group that seemingly has everything they need, and therefore requires too much sacrifice for a relationship that does not appear to offer any benefits at the time. Maybe each homogeneous group must either see a significant benefit to be realized for cultures to unite, or a purpose that is bigger than everyone's culture must be evident by all cultures involved.

One then might ask, is it impractical to expect *koinonia* to be present in the church, within the called out assembly, without a divine purpose and mandate by the Holy Spirit to the church? The complexity of separatism and disunity in the world has engendered more questions than answers, and it is disheartening to admit that the church

²⁰ Veli-Matti, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 58.

²¹ DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey, George and Kim, *United by Faith*, 28.

²² DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey, George and Kim, *United by Faith*, 28.

is walking step by step with the world, even though experiencing the presence and power of God in their own homogeneous cultural settings.

Martin Luther King Jr. argued fifty years ago that the church was still more segregated than the world. He stated,

We must face the fact that in America, the church is still the most segregated major institution in America. At 11:00 a.m. on Sunday morning when we stand and sing and Christ has no east and west, we stand at the most segregated hour in our nation. This is tragic. Nobody of honesty can overlook this. Now, I am sure that if the church had taken a strong stand all along, we wouldn't have many of the problems that we have. The first way that the church can repent, the first way that it can move out into the arena of social reform is to remove the yoke of segregation from its own body. Now that the mistakes of the past have been made, I think that the opportunity of the future is to really go out and to transform American society, and where else is there a better place than in the institution that should serve as the moral guardian of the community; the institution that should preach [brotherhood] and make it a reality within its own body.²³

One would have thought that since Christians were confronting interracial diversity from the conception of the New Testament church some 2000 years ago that division and separation in the body of Christ would be a non-issue, and the spirit of *koinonia* would be the way of life within the *ekklesia* as they seek to transform the world by the power of the Holy Spirit. However, this is not the case, and Soong-Chan Rah rightly brought to light that race seems to be the one nut that even Christianity is having a hard time cracking. He states, "Chris [his white co-author] and I believe that the first step in the reconciliation process is admitting that the race problem exists and that our inability to deal with race has weakened the credibility of our gospel."²⁴ The gospel is the

²³ Western Michigan University Archives and Regional History Collections and University Libraries, "Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 1963 WMU Speech" Found <http://wmich.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/MLK.pdf>.

²⁴ Dwight Perry, *Building Unity in the Church of the New Millennium* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), Kindle Locations 404-406.

Good News that God in Jesus Christ has fulfilled His promises to Israel, and that a way of salvation has been opened to all.²⁵ It is within this context that the author of the gospel of Mathew recorded Jesus' instruction to his disciples to go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). The commission that was given by Jesus to his disciples was to make disciples; disciples of all nations. This momentous charge was only possible through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. As the gospel of Jesus Christ spread throughout the nations however, race relations throughout the world disintegrated.

The first-century world as described in the New Testament did not experience racism in the same way it is understood today in the United States. People in that time did not have a history of European colonial expansion to the Americas that nearly decimated the indigenous population. Nor did they transport and enslave millions of people from the continent of Africa. The first-century church did not emerge in a world where political leaders, anthropologists, capitalists, theologians, and others participated in a process of creating a racial hierarchy that placed people with white skin and European ancestry in the superior position and relegated the inferior position to persons of color.²⁶

In the above reality, there can be no koinonia, and one may even go as far as to question if the Body of Christ can function under such conditions. Maybe the more relevant question should be, can unity and interracial diversity coexist when any culture creates a hierarchy that places one culture in a superior position and deems the other inferior? Or can any form of intentional separation within the body of Christ create koinonia? This lends to an interesting observation made by Soong-Chan Rah when he stated that this tendency towards separation is not only evident in majority culture churches, but is expressed most staunchly by the Black church. However, as Albert

²⁵ R. H. Mounce, "Gospel," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 426.

²⁶ DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey and Kim, *United by Faith*, 6.

Raboteau points out, “[the Black churches’] necessity was due, in part, to the racism of white Evangelicals.”²⁷ The separation of Blacks from the dominant church was not only a decision of life and death of a culture and a people of African descent, but it was a decision of being valued as people of worth or treated in a manner of servitude in every aspect of their lives.

Rah went on to mention that the deep levels of racism, cultural insensitivity, and cultural incompetence have yielded a deep-seated rift between communities in the United States. Not only have explicit examples of racism generated animosity and mistrust, but implicit approval of racism and a passive inactivity towards injustice have perpetuated the racial divide.²⁸ In agreeing, Patout Burns comments on the lack of unity in the midst of diversity and suggests that communities often differentiate themselves from their surrounding cultures by defining a boundary which identifies them and opposes and separates them from the other culture. Consequently, they establish a certain level of unity among their members on the basis of what they all rejected.²⁹ Burns may have put his finger on the carnal response that most interracial groups have manipulated to justify their homogeneous survival. What is clear is that these homogeneous exclusive behaviors all fall short of the standards and expectations that are revealed in the Word of God. These patterns of separatism perpetuate not only exclusion among members of the ekklesia, but create an illusion that the church is one when at the core it is not.

²⁷ Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2010), Kindle Location, 651-662.

²⁸ Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence*, 717-723.

²⁹ J. Patout Burns, "Establishing Unity in Diversity," *Perspectives In Religious Studies* 32, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 381-399. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed October 22, 2014, 382.

On the surface, some may say that koinonia cannot emerge in the midst of the entrenched rift that currently exists between interracial communities. However, the eschatology of the church paints a different picture. The author of Revelation recorded that "... after this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands" (Rev 7:9). One can contend that it is far reaching to believe that it is God's plan for humanity to live within their homogenous cultures and ethnicity on earth and then emerge in heaven and learn how to co-exist. There is no evidence in scripture that speaks to the authenticity of such expectations. Therefore, the alternative rests upon the fact that God's created diverse humanity will eventually be realized in this present age. Consequently, the problem that plagues the church is determining how it can live in unity in a world that is seemingly becoming more alienated. Should the church be looking for new signs or revelations, or has God already put in place the means of grace that will facilitate unity in the midst of interracial diversity?

God seems to operate on God's own time and on God's own agenda, and in the past, when the time was right, God began to unveil the mystery of God's plan of sharing the gospel to the entire world. The purpose of the good news was to reconcile humanity back to God and rebuild relations/koinonia among the nations. Luke, the author of Acts, recorded one of many events in which God set out to reconcile nations for the purpose of the Gospel. In Acts chapter ten, the narrative commenced with God, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, prompting Cornelius, a Gentile, and Peter, a Jew, to come together to capture the new vision that God had for the Church. The account took place in Cornelius'

house with his family present, along with Peter and six of his Jewish colleagues who came from Joppa to see what God had in mind.

Peter first explained to Cornelius and his family that the Jewish law prohibited him and all Jews from associating with Gentiles. He further explained that he was only there because he was instructed by God in a vision to visit them. While Peter was talking about the meaning of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the Word (v. 44). God did not wait for Peter to conclude his conversation, because it was God who was initiating and bringing into fulfillment God's plan for humanity. God simply wanted Peter and his Jewish friends to see what He was doing in the lives of non-Jews. Therefore, when Peter and his colleagues saw the manifestation of the Holy Spirit upon the lives of the Gentiles, they were astonished (v. 45), and Peter told his colleagues to baptize them with water (v. 48).

The Role of Baptism in Unity

The narrative of Acts 10 reveals that it is the Holy Spirit who quickens, chooses, and calls the lost into the invisible ekklesia, but it is by water baptism that the redeemed are welcomed into the visible ekklesia/body of Christ. It is for this reason that Peter asked his fellow Jewish friends, "What could prevent us from baptizing these Gentiles?" (v 47). Vitalis Mshanga argues that the underlying facet of ekklesia is the "concrete manifestation among human beings who have been baptized in the Spirit to form one body" (1 Cor 12:13).³⁰ There is no doubt that Mshanga is referring to the baptism of the

³⁰ Vitalis Mshanga, "The Ecumenical Vision of the Apostle Paul and Its Relevance For Contemporary Search of Full Unity of All Christians," *Exchange* 40, no. 2 (January 1, 2011): 144-169. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 24, 2014), 149.

Holy Spirit and not water baptism, because he went on to argue,

According to Paul, baptism is the beginning of a new life-in-Christ. Having been baptized in Christ's death, 'our old self is crucified with him' and gives rise to a new being (Rom 6: 6). Through baptism one is justified, that is, one is vindicated by God and inwardly renewed through faith (Rom 1: 17). Paul's use of the concept of 'justification by faith' in Romans 1:17 and Romans 3: 21-26 has not only a salvific agenda but also an ecumenical program.³¹

It is important to note that while Mshanga is using images of water baptism by emersion to connect individuals into the ekklesia, he is clearly operating beyond the scope of water baptism. Thomas Oden stated that baptism, strictly speaking, is not the same as rebirth; but the new life in Christ calls for the grace of baptism.³² He also recounted that John Wesley cautioned against any excessively spiritualized view of baptism that would diminish its physical expression: water, symbolizing death and burial in water, ritual cleansing by water, and the rising up into new life.³³ This view does not lessen the doctrine or grace of water baptism; however, it separates it from new birth. New birth in the Spirit is made palpable and public in baptism.³⁴ Does this mean that water baptism is invalid without the new birth that comes through the baptism of the Holy Spirit? The answer is an astounding "yes." This view will create further conversation as it pertains to infant baptism, but this is not the scope of this project.

The deeper issues of baptism rest upon the fact of whether its recipients who have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit should operate according to the mandates of Christ who is the head of their lives. Mshanga reminded us that through baptism, Jews

³¹ Mshanga, "The Ecumenical Vision of the Apostle Paul," 150.

³² Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Teaching: Christ and Salvation*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing), 224.

³³ Oden, *John Wesley's Teaching*, 224.

³⁴ Oden, *John Wesley's Teaching*, 225.

and Gentiles are reconciled into the one body of Christ. This implies that through His Spirit, Christ is the head and the source of life for His body, the church, to the effect that ‘we, though many, are one body’ (Rom 12: 5; cf. 1 Cor 12: 12).³⁵ Mshanga goes on to say that this reality of Christ leads neither to inequality nor uniformity among our eccle-sial communities. It leads rather to a ‘unity in diversity,’ in which the ecclesial identity of one church is largely similar, but not identical to the other church.³⁶ Baptism therefore transcends all cultural affiliations and diminishes all individual preferences that hinder unity among those who are baptized. Baptism is a grace that unifies the church and creates koinonia in the midst of interracial diversity.

Consequently, because of the interracial separation that permeates the Christian church, it seems obvious that the members of the church need to remember their baptism. This is important, as according to John Wesley, those who have received the grace of baptism remain free to deny or disregard or forget or ignore the meaning of their baptism. They are not forcibly prevented from falling from grace.³⁷ Therefore, remembering our baptism should not only be exercised when other believers are added to the body of Christ, but also as a reaffirmation where born-again believers continually participate in its meaning, both spiritually and physically.

Within the United Methodist Church, in spite of one’s race, class or ethnicity, newly baptized members are welcomed into the local congregation with these words: “Through baptism you are incorporated by the Holy Spirit into God’s new creation and made to share in Christ’s royal priesthood. We are all one in Christ. With joy and

³⁵ Mshanga, “The Ecumenical Vision of the Apostle Paul,” 154.

³⁶ Oden, *John Wesley’s Teaching*, 155.

³⁷ Oden, *John Wesley’s Teaching*, 224.

thanksgiving we welcome you as members of the family of Christ.”³⁸ Both baptism of the Holy Spirit and water baptism were designed to correct the evils of racism and reconcile all the ills that exist in the world prior to entering into the body of Christ. If interracial separation continues in the local church where diversity exists, then the language of oneness and unity becomes mere rhetoric and non Christ-like. Furthermore, if racism and intentional interracial separation and discrimination exist in the body of Christ, one may be forced to question if water baptism was administered without the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The other alternative is to assert John Wesley’s position that those who received the grace of baptism have chosen to deny, disregard, forget, or ignore the meaning of their baptism.

Oden is convinced that baptism enables and requires a renewal of our hearts, eliciting an inward change in us that seeks to become outwardly actualized in daily behavior.³⁹ One who is baptized has willingly accepted to follow the direction of the Holy Spirit and cannot continue to live as he or she did before they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the grace of water baptism. This encounter with the Holy Spirit brings forth a freedom to love all people as God’s creation with no distinction of superiority or inferiority. This is important as according to John D. Zizioulas, being true comes only from the free person, from the person who loves freely—that is, who freely affirms his being, his identity, by means of an event of communion with other persons.⁴⁰ This communion cannot be limited to homogenous relationships, or God would have

³⁸ *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of the United Methodist Worship* (Nashville, TN: Cokesbury Press), 37.

³⁹ Oden, *John Wesley’s Teaching*, 227.

⁴⁰ John D. Zizioulas, *Being As Communion, Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press), 18.

designed creation in that manner. That is why Zizioulas acknowledged that absolute freedom involves a new birth, a birth from on high, a baptism.⁴¹

The Eucharist and Unity

Zizioulas asserts that for Orthodoxy, the church is the Eucharist and through the Eucharist. The unity is made possible and lived out in the Eucharistic koinonia.⁴² Wesley is in full agreement with Zizioulas on this issue and further expounded on the solemnity of this grace. Being more specific, Wesley points out that the call to Communion/Eucharist is not to the flippant or those who have only superficially examined their lives, or to the impenitent, but precisely to those who through repentance are already bringing themselves to a point of spiritual readiness and contrite expectation of the presence of Christ.⁴³ Therefore, a deeper understanding of their position is to know that the grace of God that is present in the Eucharist is not present only in the loaf and the wine, but it is present in the Eucharistic koinonia. The Holy Spirit, the work of Christ, the repentant heart and the loaf and the wine: all of these elements make up the Eucharistic community. For it is the Spirit of God that is at work within each believer as they seek to live in harmony with God and each other. It is therefore through the continuous celebrating of the Eucharist that we break down the divided walls that separate us as we continuously repent of our past and present sins and reconcile one to the other.

The Eucharist is not only symbolic but it is also transformative. It is the Spirit working through the Eucharist that makes us “one with Christ, one with each other, and

⁴¹ Zizioulas, *Being As Communion*, 19.

⁴² Zizioulas, *Being As Communion*, 96.

⁴³ Oden, *John Wesley's Teaching*, 50.

one in the ministry to the entire world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at His heavenly banquet.”⁴⁴ Wesley would advance this thought further to state that Holy Communion is offered to those who, having repented, are seeking to live in love and charity with their neighbor, “intending to lead a new life, following the commandment of God, walking henceforth in his holy ways.”⁴⁵ The Eucharistic community lives in unity. Another transformative function of the Eucharist according to Zizioulas is that it affirms that the Eucharistic community makes the church eschatological. It frees it from the causality of natural and historical events and from limitations, which are the results of the individualism implied in our natural biological existence.⁴⁶ It is when the church sees itself as eschatological—spending eternity with the Godhead—that forgiveness and reconciliation emerge and koinonia is evident. This does not mean that the church lives for the future and does not address the evils of the present. C. S. Lewis eloquently shared that it does not mean we are to leave the present world as it is, because church history has taught us that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.⁴⁷

The question cannot be avoided, if there is such power and grace in the Eucharist, then why has racism prevailed within the church for over four hundred years? Why is inequality and oppression still prevalent in the Christian church? It appears as though sin dominates the hearts of men and women and God’s grace is continually being extended to

⁴⁴ *United Methodist Hymnal*, 10.

⁴⁵ Oden, *John Wesley's Teaching*, 50.

⁴⁶ Oden, *John Wesley's Teaching*, 22.

⁴⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Pub., 2002), 112.

all as humanity comes to the knowledge and obedience of God's Word. What is indisputable is that the grace and power that is present through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, water baptism, and the Eucharist have provided enough evidence to reconcile the world unto God and reunite every interracial group together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

No other movement in the history of the Christian church, perhaps with the exception of Reformation, has the potential to shape the thinking and practice of Christendom as much as the modern movement for Christian unity.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Veli-Matti, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 8.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Interracial diversity continues to create interesting conversations between both believers of varying faiths and unbelievers alike. These conversations are primarily designed to tackle the existing separatist behavior that exists among intelligent human beings who gravitate towards a culture of ethnic sameness in a world that is interracially interdependent.

The Christian church in particular continues to seek interracial unity within a religion that primarily worships and functions as racially exclusive, while promoting unity as a tenant of their faith. This complex issue often creates negative overtones and sometimes mixed feelings that cause some to wonder if the church has the courage to tackle this issue with openness considering the vulnerabilities that this subject tends to present.

The life and teachings of Jesus Christ in scripture have extensively addressed how the church, as the body of Christ, should function as a redeemed community. These teachings go against the core principles of most nations and individuals who seek to disempower others in an effort to lord over them. However, a careful reading of scripture opposes these worldviews and advocates for a culture of unity and harmony regardless of race, ethnicity or culture. Consequently, if scripture remains the primary source that governs, guides and influences Judeo-Christian converts, then the principles set forth in

scripture should be practiced in spite of the evils that exist outside of the covenantal relationship between God and God's redeemed community. DeYoung has joined with many scholars and asserts that the impact of racism on Christianity in the United States from colonial times to the present has produced a religion in which most congregations are uni-racial.¹ This statement does not speak to the human behaviors that should be in operation, but rather to a reality that exists as a result of the evil and selfish ambitions that have permeated our societies.

The biblical conviction therefore of living in communities of oneness calls for all peoples, both Caucasians and ethnic groups alike, to lay aside all mindsets that divide and hamper Christian unity. However, without simplifying this struggle, it can easily be argued by many Blacks living in America that racism has emotionally and economically dehumanized the Black race and as a result makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for many Blacks to trust white America again. The pain that is lodged within the souls of many Black Americans is real, and runs deep. However, in spite of those realities, Howard Thurman, a prominent African American theologian, has challenged the Black church to a calling that is higher than their painful experiences. Thurman advocated that

The Negro church and the white church are under the same ethical imperative. They are both bound by the same commitment, and no extenuating circumstance can be used as a permanent alibi for not obeying that imperative. The Negro church can no longer sit in judgment on the exclusiveness of the white church and at the same time be content to regard itself as immune to the same searching judgment.²

¹ DeYoung, Curtiss Paul; Emerson, Michael O.; Yancey, George; Kim, Karen Chai, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation As an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 177, Kindle Edition.

² Howard, Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream: The Story of the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples* (New York, NY: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 156-157.

DeYoung is swimming in a similar pool of reason as Thurman on this issue and advocates that most people need to change their worldview on racial diversity in order to participate effectively in the welcoming and acceptance of each other. He further expounded this thought by asserting that this change in mindset might seem like a judgmental statement, but contends that our racialized society in the United States has so shaped our thinking and ways of living that separation often feels normal and seems natural.³

It is within this context of living in tension in racialized communities, as opposed to living out our God given mandate to live in communities of koinonia, that this chapter will be focused. It will set out to examine ministry and industry models that have wrestled with the issues of division and separation and have created dynamic interracial communities where compromise and synergy were created for the betterment of those involved.

The four ministry settings that were selected for this purpose operated in four diverse local church contexts and were chosen as models because of their vast experience of addressing racial exclusivity in communities that became interracial and multicultural. It is important to note that all four of these local congregations were initially predominately white institutions that were determined to embrace their communities in intentional and innovative ways.

³ DeYoung, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 145.

The Riverside Church of New York City

The first church to be examined is the Riverside Church in New York City. This historic interdenominational Protestant church is one of the oldest and largest multicultural congregations in the country. Its strategic position, being located in close proximity to prominent centers of learning such as Columbia University, the Manhattan School of Music, Jewish Theological Seminary, and Union Theology Seminary makes it a prime subject for study in this regard. However, what makes the location of Riverside Church even more intriguing for this study is that it borders Harlem, the most famous African American neighborhood in the United States.⁴

This reflection would span the period of the pastoral leadership of James Forbes, the first African American pastor who was chosen over two hundred applicants. However, it does not negate the documented stellar multicultural leadership that was administered by Harry Emerson Fosdick and Scottish preacher Robert James McCracken who pastored prior to the arrival of Forbes. These two renowned pastor/leaders paved the way in creating a worldview of multiculturalism at Riverside Church that made it possible for Forbes to be considered and selected senior pastor of such a white, influential and renowned church.

It must be noted that it was a leadership board comprising only Caucasians that selected James Forbes as the principle pastor/leader of their prominent, wealthy, predominantly Caucasian congregation. However, in spite of the extensive process involved in selecting the most qualified person for this prestigious office, and even though the majority of the membership supported Forbes' ascent to the post of senior pastor of Riverside Church, conflicts still arose as a result of the hiring of their first

⁴ DeYong, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 73.

African American senior pastor. The conflict and tension infiltrated the life of the church for many years and as a result there was a progressive decline in the proportion of whites to Blacks as both members and staff took flight to other congregations. The conflict that led to the exodus of many white Christians simply demonstrated that the acknowledgement of interracial acceptance on the surface does not change the reality of cultural and racial exclusive preferences.⁵

An example of Forbes' distinctive difference from his white predecessors was evidenced in his style of preaching which, was delivered in an oratory tradition. This style was prevalent in the African American churches and it engendered vocal responses from the congregants. The energy that resulted from that oratory style invoked, Amens and clapping from the Blacks who were present. The length of the sermon was also typically longer than that of the white counterparts. These responses often prevented and hindered the white congregants from hearing the message.⁶

These differences did not however prevent the leaders or majority members of Riverside Church from their commitment of becoming a multicultural congregation. Instead, it was part and parcel to their core values, or at least it was in keeping with what they wanted to become: multicultural.

The steps that Riverside's congregation took in realizing their mission were strategic and intentional. First they created a stated mission that guided their behavior. Their Mission Statement read, "To serve God through word and witness; to treat all human beings as sisters and brothers; and to foster responsible stewardship of all God's

⁵ DeYong, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 76.

⁶ DeYong, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 76.

creation.”⁷ This statement was not simply words, but it was exemplified in the church’s culture and in their behavior. DeYoung reported that Riverside Church was a welcoming congregation that celebrated the diversity found in their congregation which was broadly inclusive of persons from different backgrounds of race, economic class, religion, culture, ethnicity, gender, age, and sexual orientation.⁸

Secondly, Riverside Church did not hide their hurt or discomfort during this period of transition, instead, they communicated with each other when there were conflicts. The white church members met with Forbes and expressed their feelings and objection about the Blacks’ response to his preaching style and its impact on their ability to hear or understand his message. Those conversations were constructive as they were concerned with finding some level of balance and compromise in a major area of worship. Being open to communicate with the pastor did not only allow him to understand their concerns but it also led to compromise and synergy that would never had come about without open communication.

DeYoung reported that today the church is reminiscent of a high church style as there are no Amens or clapping during the sermons.⁹ One can only imagine how often and how intense were those conversations which so impacted Riverside Church that it resulted in a predominately African American congregation settling for a style of high church that provokes no responses during the preached word of a formidable preacher in the United States.

⁷ DeYoung, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 77.

⁸ DeYoung, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 76.

⁹ DeYoung, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 77.

Thirdly, Riverside Church's staff began to reflect the congregants who attended worship. The shift of attendance from 60% white and 40 % Black when Forbes arrived, to 65% Black and 35% white during his pastoral leadership, created opportunities for Blacks to be hired and elected into positions of leadership. The decision to hire minorities in places of leadership speaks volumes to embracing a true multicultural and interracial diverse congregation. Although it may have been somewhat uncomfortable sitting next to minorities in worship, many did it, as they perceived that it was the right response for a Christian. Additionally, placing minorities in positions of leadership empowered them to make decisions and influence others. It helped shape the direction in which the church was heading. This action is a clear indication of the authenticity of the church's culture as it relates to equality, thereby giving minorities the respect that they too deserve.

The Mosaic Church of Los Angeles, California

Another congregation that answered the call to be multicultural was the Mosaic Southern Baptist Church located in Los Angeles, California. This predominately white church was located within one of the most racially diverse cities in the United States. Michael Emerson shared that the arts and entertainment community of that city is one of the most racially diverse subcultures of that metropolitan area.¹⁰

Similar to the Riverside Church in New York City, it was the senior pastors at Mosaic who set the tone to mobilize the church towards interracial inclusivity. Mosaic Church was a fifty-member, predominately white congregation located in a Hispanic community. However, in 1971 under the leadership of Tom Wolf the church was empowered to reach out and evangelize the Hispanic population within the community.

¹⁰ DeYong, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 78.

As a result, the church not only grew exponentially in membership from forty members to approximately 500, but the congregation became 70% Hispanic and 30% white.¹¹

Wolf was a great leader who achieved many goals in leading the church toward becoming an interracial, multicultural congregation. However, as practiced at Riverside Church in New York, Wolf did not include his Hispanic population in leadership positions. The church was accepting of the Hispanics in the pews providing they were not in the pulpit. It was not until after 1996, when Erwin McManus a Hispanic born in El Salvador became the senior pastor, that a more inclusive atmosphere of multiculturalism was further modeled and nurtured

McManus' first order of business was to lead the church in the kind of change that integrated the leadership of the church to reflect the constituents which it was called to evangelize. In other words, his focus was not on the membership in the pews as much as it was in bringing the overall church in alignment to reflect the racial makeup within the community that the church was called to serve/evangelize.

This model of allowing all-inclusive evangelism to be the driving focus of the church invariably had its impacts on the church's full administration. As the church began to align staff and leadership to reflect the racial makeup of those they were called to evangelize, it began to attract more persons of color. Consequently, Mosaic's attendance grew from approximately 500 to 1200 on a yearly basis.

Secondly, McManus continued to allow the diversity in the community to inform the diversity that the church reflected. Therefore, when a large population of Asians migrated to the community McManus also set about to evangelize that population. It is therefore not surprising that Mosaic's current racial mix is 30% Hispanic, 30% white,

¹¹ DeYong, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 78.

30% Asian American and 10% other racial groups.¹² This model of inclusivity embraced by McManus is driven by the individuals who are sent into the community by God to be evangelized by the church, and not by the preferences or the dominant groups who worship in the church.

Thirdly, McManus allocated more of the congregation's resources to local missions as opposed to international missions. This effort opened many windows of opportunity for the church to experience different cultures. Erwin McManus developed a philosophy of ministry that emphasized evangelism, cultural relevancy, and artistic creativity to meet the goal of bringing the Christian faith to these groups.¹³

Park Avenue United Methodist Church of Minneapolis, Minnesota

Another church that made deliberate strides to become a multicultural congregation was the Park Avenue United Methodist Church of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Park Avenue also began as a predominately white congregation until the 1960's when transformation changed the racial make-up of the church. It was during the 1960's that a number of church members relocated to the suburbs, creating a decline in membership. The church had to make a decision whether to stay in a predominantly African American community or relocate the church to the suburbs. The congregation's decision to stay in the community led many members to transfer their membership to other congregations. It

¹² DeYong, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 78-79.

¹³ DeYong, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 73.

also meant that Park Avenue Church now had to reach out to its neighbors who were predominantly African Americans.¹⁴

During the 1960s, the racial characteristic of Park Avenue Church was approximately 60% whites, 35% African Americans, 5% Latinos and a few Asians and Native Americans. To accommodate the differences, three services were delivered to the nearly 1300 worshipers, with the third service being a bilingual service in Spanish and English.¹⁵

The model that was used to move the church into a dynamic multicultural congregation demonstrated a commitment by all of the pastors of this transforming congregation. Central to the church's outlook were the demographics of its community. Park Avenue's church wanted to reach its community, and one of the congregation's strategies for reaching the neighborhood was to create a stellar youth program. To realize this objective, a youth pastor was hired in 1967 and commissioned to serve half time in the church and half time in the community.¹⁶ This investment in the community undoubtedly offered the church an opportunity to better understand its community as well as to offer relevant ministries that were impactful to the youth and their families.

Secondly, under different pastoral leadership the church hired minority staff and incorporated minority lay-leadership at different times of the transformation as the racial diversity of the church and community changed. In 1988 under the pastoral leadership of Robert Stamp, the Staff Parish Relations Committee hired two young seminary-trained African Americans who were in the ordination process, to serve with him on the pastoral

¹⁴ DeYong, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 86-87.

¹⁵ DeYong, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 86-87.

¹⁶ DeYong, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 87.

staff. These were important additions to the church's staff as up to this point only white clergy had served the growing multicultural congregation.¹⁷ As the community became more diverse and a larger Hispanic population moved into the community, the senior pastor, Mark Horst, spearheaded the decision in bringing a Hispanic person on staff. Horst's focus was on making sure that the broader staff and lay leadership of the congregation represented the constituency served by the congregation.¹⁸

Thirdly, the church had to take a closer look at their worship experience. The cultural diversity that existed in their worship left pastor Stamp no alternative than to address the uniformed genre of worship that existed and make available a variety of musical experiences in order to embrace and sustain a multicultural communion. Tom Fitch was hired for this purpose; he was a unique white musician who was able to bridge the worlds of Black gospel and classical anthems. Within a short period, Park Avenue had a music program that integrated a wide range of musical styles—Black gospel, classical anthems, traditional hymns, contemporary praise, reggae, country, rap, and the occasional Latin and African sounds.¹⁹

Fourthly, pastor Horst had the foresight to encourage open conversation about the issues surrounding race. Healing is only possible if hurt is exposed, and to function without true love and respect is to create a superficial unity that normally crumbles when conflict emerges. While the congregation had been multiracial for a number of years, conversations on race were often sidelined in favor of the more comfortable perspective

¹⁷ DeYong, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 87-88.

¹⁸ DeYong, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 89-90.

¹⁹ DeYong, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 88-89.

of just living together as a color-blind community.²⁰ Pastor Horst therefore took the initiative to create a space where blinders were removed and genuine conversation was fostered.

St. Pius X Catholic Church of Beaumont, Texas

St. Pius X Catholic Church offers the most simplistic model of the previous three congregations that were selected, because they became multicultural gradually and expectedly. The congregation at St. Pius was made up of white Italian and Louisiana French who had worshipped at St. Pius X from its inception. These congregants lived out their conversion and baptism experiences as exemplified in Paul's letters to the saints Galatians, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27-28, NRSV).

This Christian church embodied Christian unity and harmony irrespective of race or ethnicity. DeYoung stated that St. Pius has been racially integrated for at least forty years and for them it was no big deal.²¹

St. Pius X is currently about 50% African American, 45% white, and 5% Hispanic, and Filipino. Its boards, councils, committees, and friendship circles look much like the larger church.²² In this model, there is a factor that was consistent with the other three: the senior pastor was a nonconformist and he was exposed to race issues very early in his career. He also cared for the families who lived in the community that he was

²⁰ DeYoung, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 89.

²¹ DeYoung, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 82.

²² DeYoung, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 82.

appointed to serve. This worldview allowed them to be open minded to all people regardless of race, ethnicity, economic stability, or status in life. Therefore, when the community changed to a predominately African American community and African Americans began attending Mass, it was never perceived as odd or offensive. The church was welcoming and friendly, and it was expected that eventually the church family would reflect the racial makeup of the community.

What was helpful in this transition was that the teachings of the church and the Perusina supported the racial changes and almost no whites left the congregation.²³ It was as if the church saw diversity for what it was and never allowed otherness to make them perceive or treat others differently. Interracial diversity to St. Pius X Catholic Church was not forced, neither was it rejected, it simply evolved with the change within the community in which they were called to serve. Relationships were fostered and friendships developed.

In the secular industry, where separatism has permeated our culture and where individualism is celebrated and racism and race intolerance have been center stage for decades, there are still beacons of light shining through many facets of our civilization with respect to equality. The moral imperative that all people were created equal and should all be treated equally under the laws of the land still holds true. This segment of the paper will take a look at three secular industries and observe how the area of higher education, government, intercollegiate sports, the family and mixed marriages, have created space and opportunity for interracial diversity to take root and foster unity in the midst of diversity.

²³ DeYong, *The Multiracial Congregation*, 83.

The Benefits of Diversity in Higher Education

Receiving a quality education may be considered the most important asset that an individual could possess. Fortunately, or unfortunately, education tends to define ones' success or failure, and even though success may be measured differently from culture-to-culture, country-to-country and individual-to-individual, it is clear that knowledge is an invaluable asset.

History has witnessed that the likelihood of the least educated person being successful is rare. This could lend understanding to the rationale of the treatment of Blacks by whites during and after slavery. Tim Wise reported that for generations the Southern States made it illegal to teach Black slaves how to read English. Even outside of the South there was simply no formal educational opportunity for the vast majority of African Americans until the twentieth century.²⁴ This and other laws were not only put in place as a ploy to segregate Blacks from whites, but also to keep Blacks disempowered and unable to function at a competent level in a country that was designed to keep them poor and dependent on whites, while whites grew wealthy and stayed in power and control.

However, strides were made in higher education in an effort to close this education gap between Blacks and whites and also to move from a culture of separation to a culture of embracing interracial diversity. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin argue that higher education will be most influential when students encounter an educational environment that deviates from students' prior experiences and when its diversity and complexity encourage active thinking and an intellectual interest in exploring new and

²⁴ Tim J. Wise, *Affirmative Action, Racial Preference in Black and White* (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 38.

different educational experiences.²⁵ This model is designed to give youngsters opportunities to disconnect from the ills of their fore-parents' behaviors that were not wholesome as it pertained to issues of race. This younger generation would receive opportunities not only to think for themselves, but to experience relationships that will transform their thinking. Sorensen believes that for most students, higher education is uniquely situated within late adolescence and early adulthood, when individuals shift from an unwavering endorsement of the worldviews of their parents, guardians, and teachers and begin to explore where they see themselves fitting into society and the political discourse.²⁶

Gurin stated that research has found that racially and ethnically diverse campuses significantly enhance students' intellectual development in numerous ways.²⁷ Cole quoted many scholars in his effort to support his claim that interaction on racial and ethnically diverse campuses enhanced all diverse groups in their learning outcomes, openness and understanding of diversity, higher levels of academic development, intellectual engagement, enhanced critical thinking and intellectual self-concepts.²⁸ At many levels, when individuals and groups move from individualism and separatism to unity through diversity, the benefits are wholesome and relationships are strengthened.

²⁵ Nicholas Sorensen, et al. "Taking a "Hands On" Approach to Diversity in Higher Education: A Critical-Dialogic Model for Effective Intergroup Interaction." *Analyses Of Social Issues & Public Policy* 9, no. 1 (December 2009): 4. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost, (accessed February 4, 2015), 5.

²⁶ Sorensen, et al. "Taking a "Hands On," 4.

²⁷ Darnell Cole, "Do Interracial Interactions Matter? An Examination of Student-Faculty Contact and Intellectual Self-Concept." *Journal Of Higher Education* 78, no. 3 (May 2007): 249-281. *Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson)*, EBSCOhost, (accessed February 4, 2015).

²⁸ Cole, "Do Interracial Interactions Matter?" 249-281.

Government, Policies of Affirmative Action

Tim J. Wise documented that in the 1960s and early 1970s the government enacted into law policies on affirmative action as a way to ensure opportunity for people of color, and white women who had been locked out of full participation in the job market and higher education.²⁹ These policies opened doors and created avenues of diversity in the workplace as well as in specific educational career fields that were off limits to Blacks and women. Michael Brown pointed out that even with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, companies and contractors continued to block people of color from opportunities by way of subtle mechanisms such as bogus qualifications requirements, and reliance on old-boys networks that were nearly all white, thanks to decades of discrimination.³⁰ However, the continuous engagement of people of color with white Americans has erased many stereotypes and opened many opportunities for Blacks to serve as leaders in white-owned businesses. Blacks and white women now have prominent roles in television and mass media and are leaders in politics and business.

In 2008, whites, Blacks, Latinos, and other minorities were elected into office as President of The United States of America, Barack Obama, a by-product of slavery, elevated into the most powerful position of the free world. In 2012, the country re-elected him as president for four more years. In a democratic country where each individual has a right to cast his or her vote, a Black man in a majority white country was elected to serve two terms. This outcome is a direct correlation between the acceptance of others and the

²⁹ Wise, *Affirmative Action, Racial*, 11.

³⁰ Michael K. Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2003), 167.

work that was done over the years to be inclusive as a people. The Government and the courts have been instrumental in creating policy and enacting laws that are helping to create healing in a country that enforced the most evil form of slavery in our recorded existence.

Intercollegiate Sports

Pike and Kuh affirmed that the call for improving cross-cultural understanding has never been louder than from those interested in student development.³¹ It is on the backdrop of that understanding that Scott Hirko declared racially diverse teams may be the perfect locale for quality interactions, especially given the close bonds that teammates form.

Teams are a tight subculture, practicing and competing together and often taking classes, studying, and socializing together.³² There is something intriguing within the human dynamics that teaches us that when the team's purpose is bigger than the individual's personal interest, collaboration surfaces. One will not have to dig too deeply to ascertain the ultimate goal of an intercollegiate sports team. From the tender age of five, coaches and parents have repeated over and over and ingrained into the minds of youngsters that the reason we form a team is to win. That is why Hirko asserts

Interpersonal contact between members of different groups leads to positive outcomes when a purpose is shared. He further contends that athletics is an ideal environment in which to study social contract theory because there are not only

³¹ G. R. Pike, and G. D. Kuh, "Relationships Among Structural Diversity, Informal Peer Interactions and Perceptions of the Campus Environment," *Review of Higher Education*, 2006, 29(4): 425-450.

³² Scott Hirko, "Intercollegiate Athletics and Modeling Multiculturalism," *New Directions For Higher Education* no. 148 (January 1, 2009): 93, *ERIC*, EBSCOhost, (accessed February 4, 2015).

common goals on teams but also equal status, an ethos of cooperation, and even institutional supports to regulate and encourage such an environment.³³

It is within this construct that winning trumps race, and the desire to win creates behaviors which will foster opportunities to win if athletes personalize their teammates, viewing them as individuals and not through a racial lens.³⁴ This transformative behavior does not lead to the abandonment of racial identity, but as Stephan and Stephan asserts, this concept occurs when a student athlete maintains attachment to his or her racial group (subgroup) while simultaneously and increasingly identifying with a super-ordinate group; the athlete's team.³⁵ Intercollegiate athletes of all races have consciously made the decision to work in unity, laying aside racial differences for the purpose of winning.

Family and Mixed Marriages

In spite of the institutional racism and separatism that exist within our multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-generational world, individuals all over are falling in love and creating families, friendships and bonds that are going against the stereotypes of division, and separation. There seems to be chemistry when individuals are exposed to each other in positive ways irrespective of the differences that may exist between them.

Stanley Rosenbaum alluded to the fact that when most persons envision a mixed marriage they think of Jewish/Christian unions and Black/white partnerships. He further concluded that many combinations of mixed marriages-ethnic, racial, and religious-occur

³³ Hirko, "Intercollegiate Athletics and Modeling Multiculturalism Ibid., 94.

³⁴ Hirko, "Intercollegiate Athletics and Modeling Multiculturalism, 94.

³⁵ W. G. Stephan, and C. W. Stephan, "Intergroup Relations in Multicultural Education Programs," In J. A. Banks and C. A. Banks (eds.), *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

and lead to unexpected difficulties.³⁶ Rosenbaum's conclusion may lead some to believe that homogeneous marriages have different results, but reality tells us differently. Joel Crohn also shares on the subject of mixed marriages. It may surprise many, that when Crohn chronicled mixed matches, he was making references to Japanese American/Southern Baptist, (Turkish) Muslim/Orthodox Christian, African-American/Irish-American, and an Armenian couple; one born in the U.S. and the other in Teheran.³⁷ Crohn contends that what divide us most often are cultural differences, of which we may be only minimally aware. He further argues that rather than submerging these differences, marriage tends to exacerbate them.³⁸

In many diverse relationships unity and love tend to emerge, while differences for the most part are managed, put into context, and dealt with appropriately. What is clear however is that there is work to be done when people of different cultures, races, ethnicity, and religions unify. Mixed relationships are becoming more frequent and as society becomes more accepting this practice will become the norm. It may take the union of interracial families to lead the way to unity in the world.

There is no doubt that the human mind is always driven by influences that feed the physical, social, economic, and spiritual appetites. In the pre-mentioned ministry models it was evident that the churches and their leaders were directed by a spiritual and

³⁶ Stanley Ned Rosenbaum, "Mixed Matches: How to Create Successful Interracial, Interethnic, and Interfaith Relationships." *Journal Of Ecumenical Studies* 33, no. 3 (June 1, 1996): 403-404. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 9, 2015).

³⁷ Rosenbaum, "Mixed Matches, 403-404.

³⁸ Joel Crohn, *Mixed Matches: How to Create Successful Interracial, Interethnic, and Interfaith Relationships* (New York, NY: Ballentine Books, Random House, 1995), 335.

moral mandate that guided their behaviors. However flawed and different, their approaches were to seek unity in the midst of diversity; the local churches were all answering to a written document that informs their moral compass. However, they each operated according to their interpretation and convictions.

Conversely, the secular industries do not have such luxury, they serve a much more complex constituency and their mandate is much more pluralistic. The secular world's focus is temporal, changing laws and policies allows them to address inequalities that predominantly favor the majority population, which may or may not benefit the minorities. However, both the ministry models and the secular models were moving in the same direction to afford all peoples the opportunity to live in unity wherever possible.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this doctoral project is to create a biblical model for the leadership at Temple Terrace United Methodist Church (TTUMC) in Tampa, Florida. It is intended that this study would allow the membership to embrace and treat other minority cultures as worthy of being instruments of God's grace during corporate worship. The goal is to seek to understand if members of diverse cultures, through an authentic understanding of Baptism and the Eucharist, can be allowed to honor the presence of God within the uniqueness of their culture. The results of this project will be incorporated into the New Members Classes at TTUMC. It will also be used to provide training within the six districts of the Florida Conference.

There is a tremendous lack of awareness among majority cultures as it pertains to embracing racial diversity throughout the United Methodist Church. This is true within the white, Black, Hispanic, and Korean churches, to mention a few. As a result, there is a need for pastors and lay leaders to be intentional in creating safe spaces for otherness. This study will help churches move beyond their cultural comfort zones and see cultural diversity as their new norm. The church must get on board and begin to live-out the eschatological reality that God has revealed through the apostle John: "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every

nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the lamb...”
(Rev 7:9 NIV).

The church membership at TTUMC in Tampa, Florida has been gradually declining over the years. This predominately Caucasian congregation, which was once affluent, attributes its decline to the construction of low-income housing that surrounds the church. As the housing complex deteriorated, more and more minorities moved into the immediate community. This did not only create an exodus for many whites, but it also became a deterrent for many Caucasians within a five-mile radius to choose TTUMC as their home church. Many attempts were made to reach out to the community to meet their needs, but the church did not evangelize the minorities as people of equal worth. Hence, there was never a community of belonging, ownership, family or shared communion. The Caucasian majority culture offered the minorities what they believed the minorities needed. They offered them a Christ without authentic fellowship.

At the core of the church's problem is a lack of the practical application of baptism and the Eucharist. Christ did not die to save individuals only, Christ also died for humanity to live in communion with God and with each other. This project will call the church to see baptism and the Eucharist as more than symbols which point to Christ, or means of grace without purpose. The church must expand its understanding of means of grace and also see baptism as the means that incorporates every born again believer into a higher culture that transcends any culture or experience that they had before. In this new Christian culture, “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). An authentic

understanding of baptism offers a multicultural, interracial, multigenerational community, and the Eucharist sustains it.

This project is based on the hypothesis that if any majority culture embraces minorities as indispensable members within the body of Christ, then a more accepting environment will emerge, and a safe space will surface that will foster an openness for otherness to be celebrated and differences respected. The expected result will foster a more diverse involvement in corporate worship, which will create a culture of belonging and acceptance. It will also give rise to the manifestation of untapped gifts and resources and a diversified worship experience that will evolve to the extent where there will be fewer spectators and more worshippers. Finally it will expand the scope of evangelism, as different cultures will come to hear and share in their cultural identity and be exposed to otherness as well.

Dominant cultures often find it easy to worship out of their own experiences and monolithic thinking. A fresh interpretation of scripture through the intentional lens of interracial diversity could help Christians to perceive church in a more holistic and less exclusive way. This project solicited the participation from the entire church, and was led and facilitated by the senior pastor, peer associates and context associates of Temple Terrace United Methodist Church in Tampa, Florida.

Methodology

A qualitative research method was used to facilitate this project. The nature of the questions were designed to ascertain the knowledge-base of the recipients as it pertained to their interpretation of baptism, Eucharist and the work of the Holy Spirit in creating unity through diversity. Three methods were used to collect the data, namely: pre and

post surveys, sermons and Bible studies. The pre and post surveys were administered to ascertain the recipients' understanding of some general theological concepts, but more specifically, there were questions that were weighted towards interracial diversity to further flesh out how the respondents connected interracial diversity to the work of Holy Spirit, baptism, and the Eucharist. The sermons series was intended to explore God's purpose for humanity as it related to the function of the church, as expressed in the diversity of the body of Christ. The sermons covered both the Old and New Testaments and shed light from the oneness of humanity to the conception of diversity. The Bible study was designed to take a fresh look at salvation, baptism and the Eucharist and align them to the will of God in God's reconciling process of humanity.

Proposed Project Calendar

Date(s)	Activity
June-July, 2015	Context Associates Team develops survey
August 16, 2015	Present Project to congregation during worship
August 16-August 30, 2015	Register those committed to participate in the project
August 30, 2015	Hold meeting with project participants to obtain their consent and complete pre-project survey.
September 13, 2015	Sermon 1
September 20, 2015	Sermon 2
September 27, 2015	Sermon 3
October 3, 2015	Conduct 4-hour class on the Eucharist, baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit. Complete post-study survey
October 4, 2015	Sermon 4
October 12, 31, 2015	Evaluate survey data

Implementation

The emphasis of this chapter is to provide an analysis and interpretation of the data that was collected during the project that was conducted at Temple Terrace United Methodist Church. The lack of involvement during worship of those within the minority cultures, and the lack of cultural awareness to incorporate diverse cultural components to the worship experience have engendered the need to understand the implicit theology of those who lead worship and the church as a whole who accept it. The rationale is that if the church brings to the surface the implicit theology of exclusion of other minority cultures, then it will be better able to understand and work towards a theology of embracing otherness.

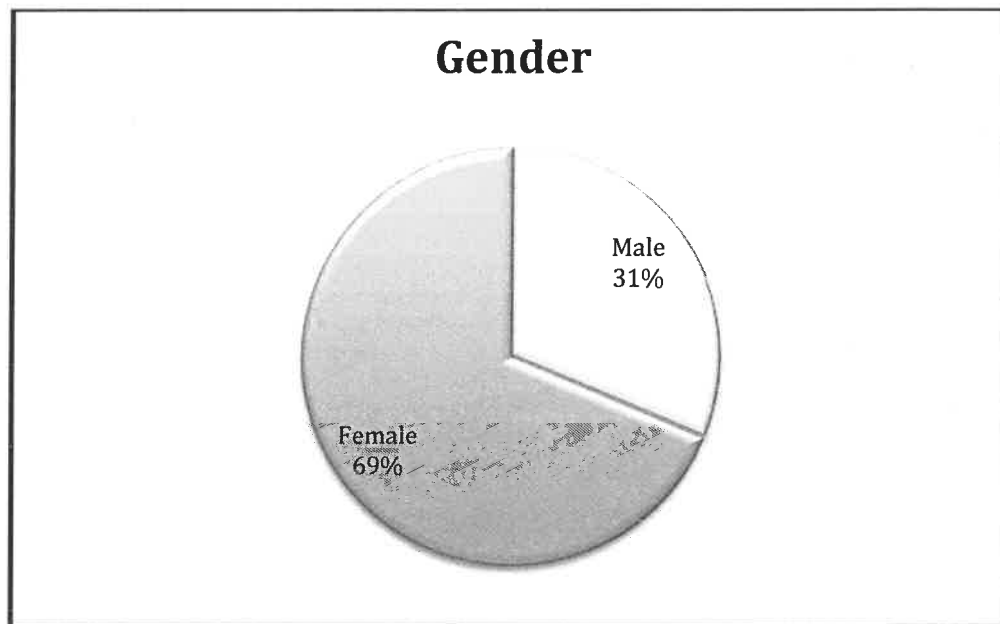
At the initial stage of this project, the Context Associates were selected and informed of the scope of the project. The team consisted of ten individuals: five whites, two East Indians, one African American and two Jamaicans. The team was committed to the project and worked diligently in involving the church at large, as well as creating the pre and post survey.

The church as a whole was willing to participate in the project; however the conversations surrounding embracing interracial diversity were uncomfortable for all the cultures within the church. The schedule for the project was placed in the bulletin a month in advance, the first town hall meeting was set, and all those who were interest in learning more about the project were invited. The senior pastor gave an overview of the scope of the project and invited all who were committed to the process to stay for more details and expectations.

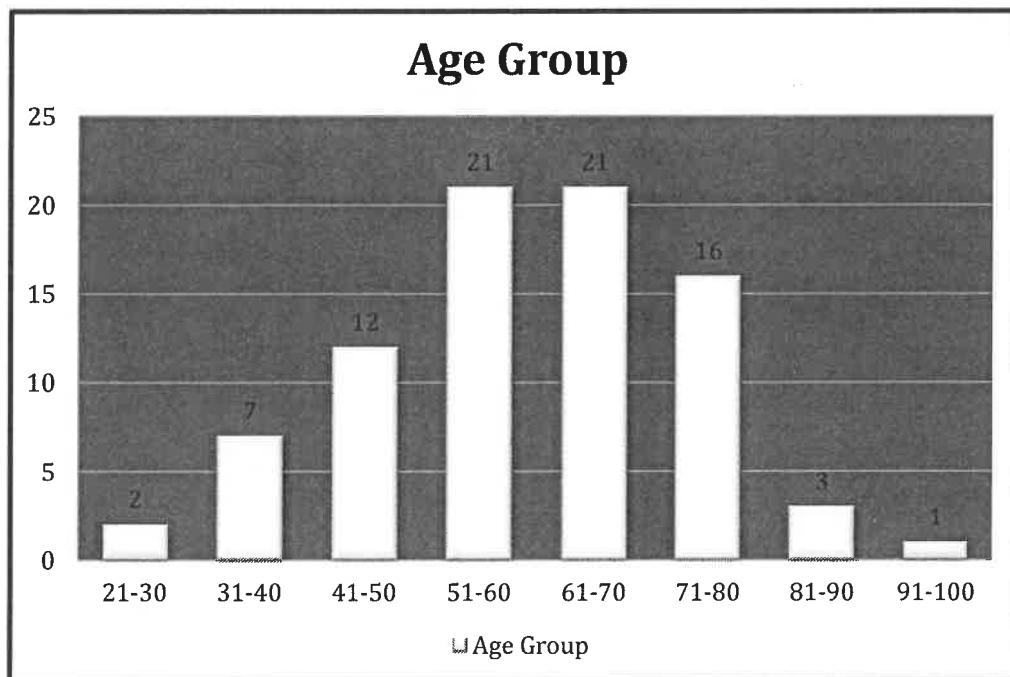
A consent application was given to all recipients who decided to stay. The application was fully explained by the chair of the context associates team. The application documented the purpose of the research, the requirements and expectations, the benefits of participating in the study and how the survey responses would be used. After a period of questions and answers, each person who agreed to participate in the project signed the consent form. Following the signing, the pre-survey application was given only to the participants who signed the consent form. The pre-survey form was explained in detail and the recipients completed the forms in the presence of the context associates team. The applications were then placed in a sealed envelope and given to the senior pastor. Only individuals who signed the consent form and participated in the pre-survey were able to continue in the study. This was important in order to understand the recipients' views before they received the sermons and Bible studies. It needs to be mentioned that the pre-survey and the post-survey were the same document given to the recipients. This is intentional to show the change in their understanding of the questions that they answered in the pre-survey after being exposed to in the sermons and Bible study. See results of the pre-survey below:

Pre-Survey

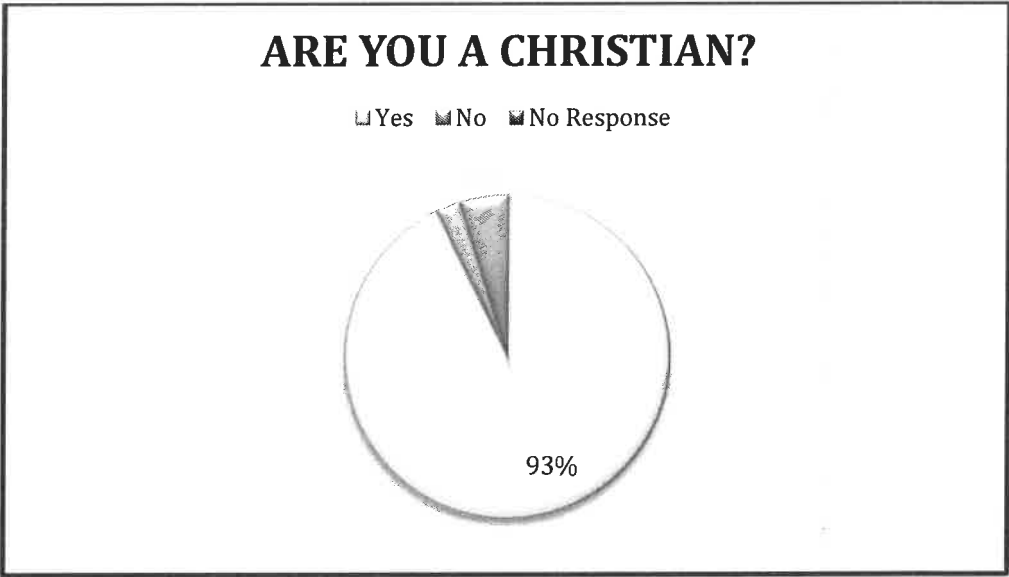
Members who attended



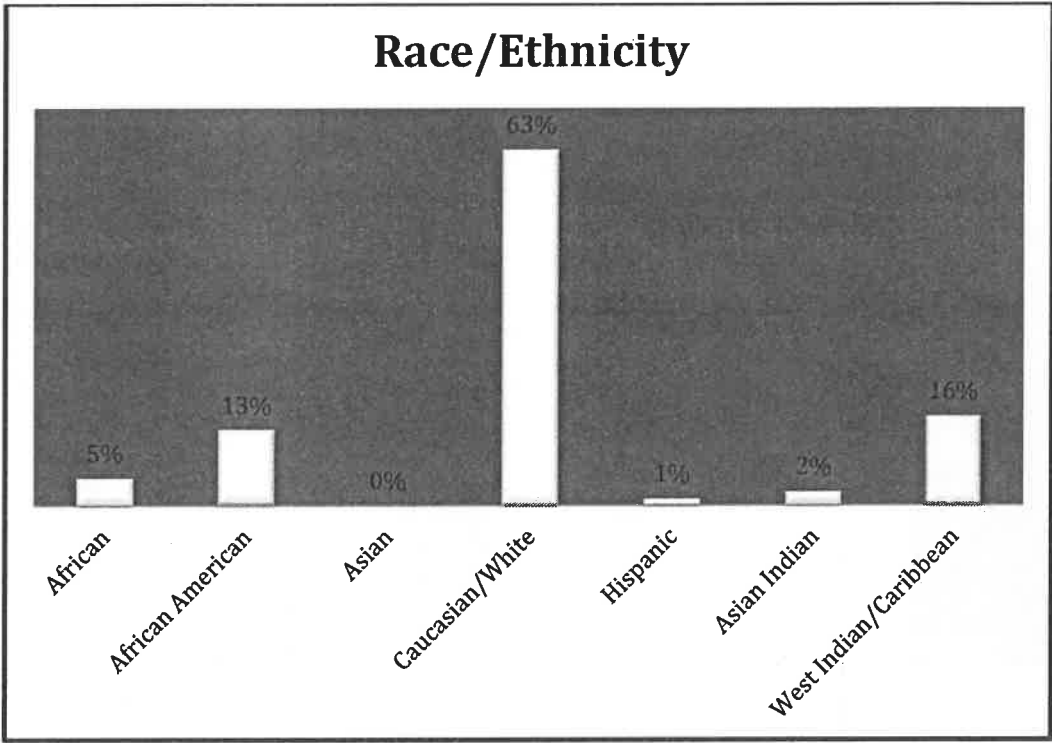
Age Groups Participation



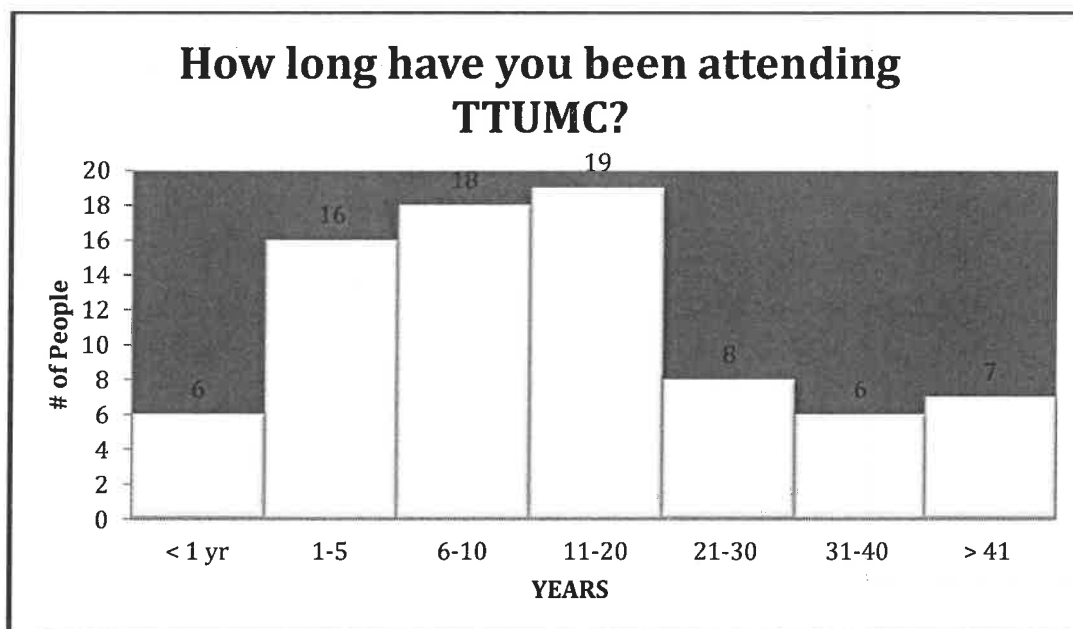
Christian Affiliation



Cultural Identity



Membership Status



The purpose of the questions below were designed to reveal the recipients' understanding of baptism, Eucharist and the work of the Holy Spirit as revealed in interracial diversity, before they attended and completed all requirements of the study. For the purpose of the project, the questions that are shaded were the ones of focus for this study.

1. What does baptism do?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure	No Response
What does Baptism do?						
Admits me into Gods Family	46.99%	27.71%	8.43%	9.64%	1.20%	6.02%
Converts me to Christianity	18.07%	31.33%	27.71%	13.25%	4.82%	4.82%
Assures my Salvation	10.84%	27.71%	34.94%	22.89%	3.61%	0.00%
Achieves my Salvation	13.25%	15.66%	37.35%	19.28%	7.23%	7.23%
Eradicates prejudice	7.23%	13.25%	38.55%	30.12%	8.43%	2.41%
Creates cultural unity in me	7.23%	28.92%	37.35%	15.66%	8.43%	2.41%
Changes my understanding of others	9.64%	36.14%	30.12%	15.66%	8.43%	0.00%
Causes me to treat everyone as God's creation	22.89%	31.33%	24.10%	10.84%	4.82%	6.02%
Causes me to love all Christians	15.66%	30.12%	36.14%	10.84%	4.82%	2.41%
Makes me equal with others	15.66%	20.48%	39.76%	14.46%	6.02%	3.61%
Changes my cultural perspective	9.64%	24.10%	38.55%	14.46%	7.23%	6.02%
Changes my acceptance of others	12.05%	38.55%	27.71%	13.25%	4.82%	3.61%

2. What does participating in the Eucharist (Holy Communion) do?

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATING IN THE EUCHARIST (HOLY COMMUNION) DO?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure	No Response
Sustains my cultural acceptance of others	20.48%	50.60%	20.48%	2.41%	4.82%	1.20%
Maintains my relationship with God's family	24.10%	45.78%	15.66%	3.61%	6.02%	4.82%
Changes my cultural perspectives of other cultures	3.61%	30.12%	37.35%	12.05%	8.43%	8.43%
Nourishes my faith	21.69%	48.19%	14.46%	4.82%	6.02%	4.82%
Makes me equal with others	14.46%	24.10%	48.19%	1.20%	2.41%	9.64%
Aware of my salvation	12.05%	30.12%	33.73%	6.02%	7.23%	10.84%
Ensures my sin is forgiven	19.28%	24.10%	36.14%	7.23%	8.43%	4.82%
Gradually diminishes my prejudice	9.64%	39.76%	31.33%	7.23%	1.20%	10.84%
Reminds me that I am a sinner	25.30%	53.01%	10.84%	2.41%	1.20%	7.23%
Changes my understanding of others	2.41%	45.78%	36.14%	6.02%	4.82%	4.82%
Causes me to treat everyone as God's creation	12.05%	60.24%	6.02%	3.61%	3.61%	14.46%
Reminds me to love everyone unconditionally	36.14%	51.81%	6.02%	1.20%	1.20%	3.61%

3. What does the Holy Spirit do in me through baptism and the Eucharist?

WHAT DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT DO IN ME THROUGH BAPTISM AND THE EUCHARIST?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure	No Response
Teaches me to love everyone, whatever their race or culture	51.81%	38.55%	9.64%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Enables me to experience unity in diversity	38.55%	40.96%	13.25%	0.00%	6.02%	1.20%
Teaches me that all people are God's creation	55.42%	33.73%	6.02%	1.20%	2.41%	1.20%
Decreases my focus on myself	48.19%	36.14%	7.23%	2.41%	3.61%	2.41%
Helps me value people who are different from me	37.35%	42.17%	9.64%	1.20%	4.82%	4.82%
Brings me strength	51.81%	40.96%	1.20%	1.20%	1.20%	3.61%
Empowers me to embrace interracial diversity	38.55%	39.76%	10.84%	1.20%	8.43%	1.20%
Changes me to be more Christ-like	54.22%	42.17%	0.00%	1.20%	1.20%	1.20%

Sermons

After the completion of the pre-survey, the senior pastor preached a four series sermon during Sunday morning worship. Each Sunday after worship, each member received a hard copy of the sermon to take home. If a recipient missed a sermon, there were make-up classes available. A member of the context analysis team met with them at a scheduled time and location and allowed them to view the sermon on video. After the

sermon they received a hard copy of the sermon for further reference. The series was intended to explore God's purpose for humanity as it related to the function of the church, as expressed in the diversity of the body of Christ. The intent was to give the post-modern believer an opportunity to question the sins of our history, repent of our corporate sins and embrace otherness with renewed excitement.

The first sermon was entitled, "Created in the Image of God." Its intent was to reveal the unique connectedness between God and humanity. The primary scriptures were Genesis 1:26-27, as well as Genesis 2:7. These two narratives, distinct but related, disclose that out of what God had already created—the soil, God formed male and female. Then, after they were formed, God breathed that which was not created into them—His breath. God breathed God self into them, and they became living souls. For the image and likeness of God are not associated with our physical appearance, as much as they are connected with God's breath. The Spirit of God was breathed into humanity, which gave them life. Hence, if God is a Spirit, then God's image and likeness must be spiritual and not physical, as some may believe. Therefore, as important as our physical appearances may be to us and as much as we have allowed the exterior wrappings of our souls to define us, this has never been how God ultimately defined God's image in us.

David experienced this early in his life when God was seeking to anoint a new king (1 Sm 16). God sent Samuel the priest to Jesse who had eight sons from which to anoint a king. Jesse summoned all of his sons to come before Samuel in order that Samuel could select the one to be anointed. David however was not invited to the party because he did not fit the physical requirement of Jesse; David was overlooked because of his physical appearance and his age. However, when Samuel took a look at Eliab,

Jesse's oldest son, he was impressed by his physical appearance and said that Eliab had to be the one. In Samuel's mind, there was no need to look any further.

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Sm 16:7, NRSV).

God is connected to us through His image and His likeness, because God created us in God's image and God's likeness.

The second sermon was entitled "The Scattering of the People" and surveyed Genesis chapter 11. It explored God fulfilling God's plan for humanity by scattering the descendants of Noah all over the earth, allowing them to function in family-groups that linguistically understood each other. This brought to the surface an interesting observation that the diversity of language became the dividing factor that mobilized Noah's descendants to inhabit the whole earth, which led to the evolution of different races and cultures. Genesis 10:5 was one of the verses that captured this perspective. From these the people who live beside the sea spread out into their land, each one by his language, family, and nation. Robert Jamieson alluded to the fact that it is only from the scriptures we learn the true origin of the different nations and the languages of the world.¹ From one race came many races and from one language came many languages.

The third sermon was entitled "Unity in Diversity." The primary text that fleshed out the sermon was Acts 2:1-12. It connected God's plan for humanity some one 150 generations later from the time of Noah. Luke, the writer of Acts paid special attention to the interracial diversity that was present during the time of this initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon believers. Luke wrote, there were Jews from, "...Parthians, Medes,

¹ Gordon J. Wenham, "Genesis 1-15," *World Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 240.

Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs” (Acts 2: 9-11, NLT). To simplify and to be more inclusive of those who attended Pentecost, Luke wrote in verse five “that there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5, NIV). One must take note that these were all Jews or converts to Judaism who were in search of forgiveness of sins, offering sacrifices unto God and rendering thanksgiving to the God of their ancestors. One must remember that it was a miracle that assigned different languages to humanity at Babel and scattered the descendants of Noah over the face of the earth, and it would take a miracle to re-unite them. Sin was the catalyst that caused humanity to be scattered and the forgiveness of sin would be the stimulus that re-unites them.

Luke’s account did not give us any indication that it was God’s intent to change peoples’ cultures or race, but God’s intent was to re-unite them to the purpose of their creator and creation. God wanted them to live-out the spiritual purpose for which they were created. God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, was reconnecting them to the image of God that was inherent within them. This connection creates a universal culture that transcends any physical culture that comes about through our physical and sociological shared experiences. Luke’s account was recorded this way:

On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability (Acts 2: 1-4, NLT).

It was God who scattered humanity and it was God who was re-uniting them. Luke received word that everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. This was a God moment and God's initiative, and the Apostles were simply instruments of God's choosing. God, through the power of His Holy Spirit used ordinary men to communicate His message to everyone who was present.

The fourth and final sermon was entitled, "One Body, Many Members." It captured the narrative written in 1 Corinthians 12:12. It focused on the work of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost while examining God's plan in uniting converts from all over the earth into the body of Christ. The process of uniting different races and cultures to create one culture is extremely complex on many fronts. However, to begin this transition one must bring to the surface, at least through intentional conversation, the physical, psychological and emotional violence that took place between the races and nations throughout history. If we were to name two of the most devastating evils that have destroyed the relationships among races and nations, wars and slavery would emerge to the top of most peoples' list. Yet, at many levels, both the Old and New Testaments have sanctioned these two behaviors (Dt 20, Jos 6:21, Jos 11:20, Dt 13:15; Ex 21:20-21, Lev 25:44-46, Pt 2:18). Keeping this in mind, we must avoid the easy way out of this complex hostile reality by simply pointing the finger at our perceived perpetrators and instead follow the leading of the Holy Spirit for our time. Therefore, when we speak of embracing interracial diversity and new life in the body of Christ, we are not only speaking about reconciliation unto God but we are also speaking of reconciliation between individuals, races, and nations.

Using the motif of the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to unify all cultures around the message of the resurrection of Christ is central to how God began to create His universal Christocentric culture. The supernatural experience at Pentecost was pivotal in demonstrating God's purpose for re-uniting humanity. Let us make plain the process. The message explaining Jesus as the Messiah must be shared; the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit will follow and fill the individuals who accept the message by faith. Then those who are filled with the Holy Spirit are commanded by Jesus to be water baptized. This is God's plan to reconcile all of humanity unto Him and to each other. There are no exceptions and no one is excluded. Each born-again believer is welcomed into the Body of Christ. Because of God's plan to break down the hostility and dividing walls among races and nations, Paul could say to the church at Corinth,

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor 12:12, NRSV).

The church can no longer choose who they want to associate with, or be selective of whom they receive into full fellowship within the Body of Christ. Christians can no longer exclude or marginalize any part of humanity because of the sins of history. The abusers of power must repent for their individual sins and the corporate sins of their culture and race, and the victim must repent for what the abuser has allowed them to become. Both victim and abuser of power must repent of the sins of their culture and enter a new Christocentric culture where the Holy Spirit would continuously heal the wounds of our past.

Bible Study

The Bible study was done in a retreat format on Saturday October 3, 2015 from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. The Bible study addressed the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation, baptism and the Eucharist. The state of humanity without the acceptance of Christ in their lives was central to this project. The salvation component covered:

Salvation

- God created us as 3-part beings: Body, Spirit and Soul. 1 Thessalonians 5:23
- Our human condition at birth: Sin separates us from God. Romans 3:23
- God's solution to our sin problem. Romans 6:23
- We cannot be saved without re-birth of our spirit. John 3: 1-6
- The Kingdom of God. Romans 14:17
 - Nicodemus was looking for a kingdom he could see with his natural eyes.
 - Jesus clarified that the kingdom of God is only seen in the realm of the Spirit.
- What Happens at salvation when we are born-again
 - The Holy Spirit transforms our spirit when we are born-again.
- How we are saved, or re-born. Romans 10:9-10
- Prayer of salvation

Baptism

The Baptism component focused on what water Baptism was designed to do:

- Creates a people as the differentiated body of Christ.
 - Bodily inscribed differences are brought together, not removed.
- The body of Christ lives as a complex interplay of differentiated bodies- Jewish and gentile, female and male, slave and free.
- The Spirit does not erase bodily inscribed differences, but allows access into the one body of Christ to the people with such differences on the same terms.
 - What the Spirit does erase (or at least loosen) is a stable and socially constructed correlation between differences and social roles.
- The gifts of the Spirit are given irrespective of such differences.
- The Spirit creates equality by disregarding differences when baptizing people into the body of Christ or imparting spiritual gifts.
 - Differentiating the body matters, but not for access to salvation and agency in the community.²

Eucharist

The study of the Eucharist was designed to take the focus from the elements to its purpose:

- The Eucharist is not a matter of eating and drinking, but it is a matter of the heart.
- The Eucharist is the ritual time in which we celebrate God “making-space-for-us-and-inviting-us-in.”³

² Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 48. Kindle Edition.

³ Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 129.

- God's embrace is far-reaching, and God consumes us with God's love.
- Our sins, however horrific are no match for God's grace.
- God's grace becomes present no matter our condition or predicament.
- "Inscribed on the very heart of God's grace is the rule that we can be its recipients only if we do not resist being made into its agents. What happens to us must be done by us."⁴
- There is no place in the redeemed community for exclusion or prejudice, and if those habits linger within believers then the grace of God that manifests itself through the Eucharist will remind us of what Christ has done for us and constantly invite us to repent of our sins and continue to create the same safe space that was extended to us; to all.
- In receiving Christ's broken body and spilled blood, we, in a sense, receive all those whom Christ received by suffering.⁵

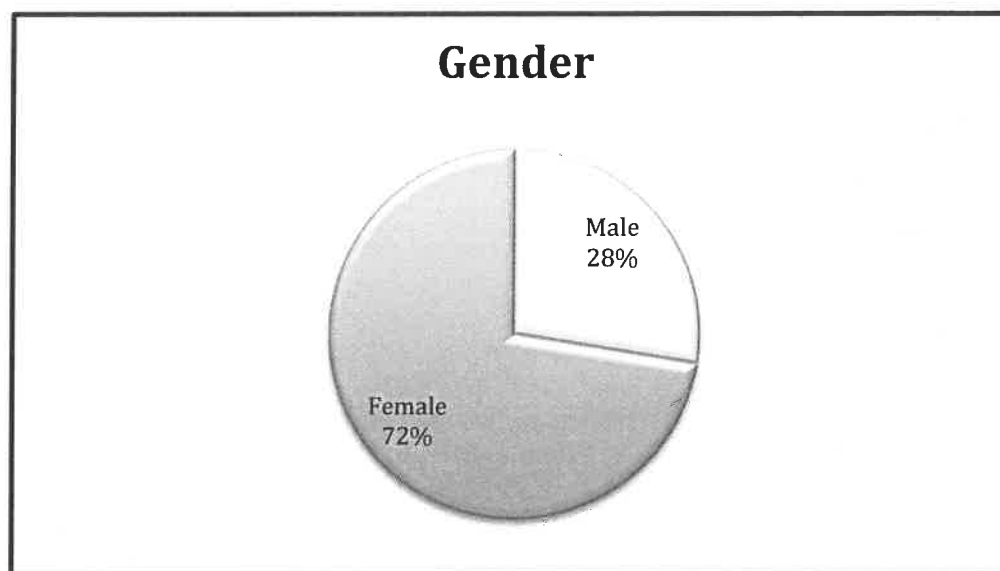
Subsequent to the delivery of the sermon series and Bible study on the work of the Holy Spirit, baptism, and the Eucharist, the post-survey was given to the recipients, after the Eucharist was administered. The purpose of the questions below was designed to reveal the recipients' understanding of baptism, Eucharist and the work of the Holy Spirit as revealed in interracial diversity, after they attended and completed all requirements of the study. For the purpose of the project, the questions that are shaded were the ones of focus for this study.

⁴ Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 129.

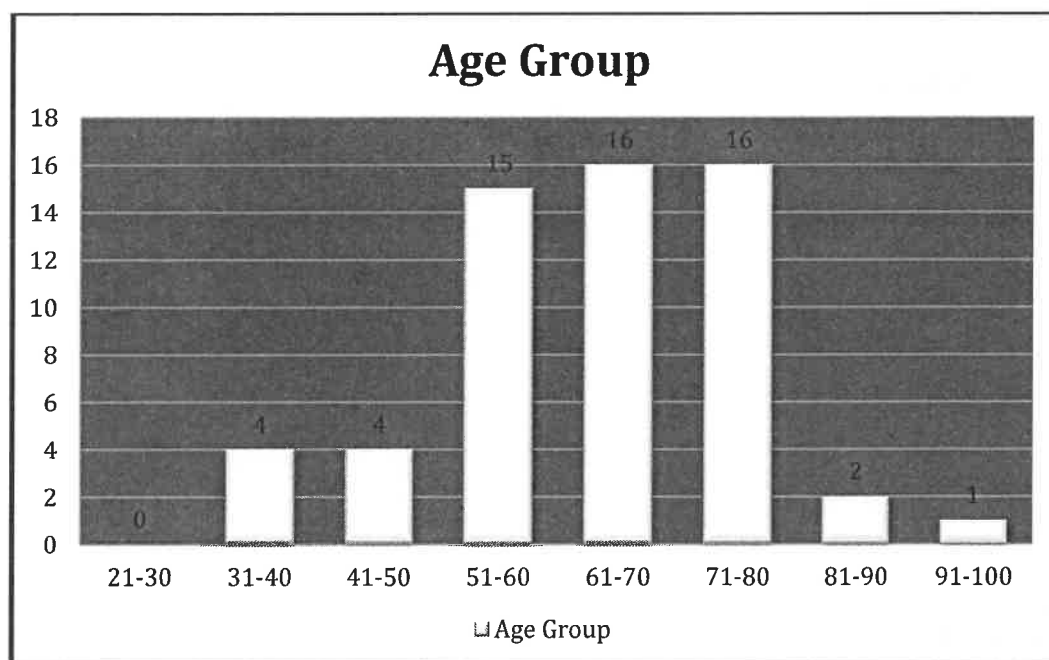
⁵ Volf, Miroslav, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 129.

Post-Survey

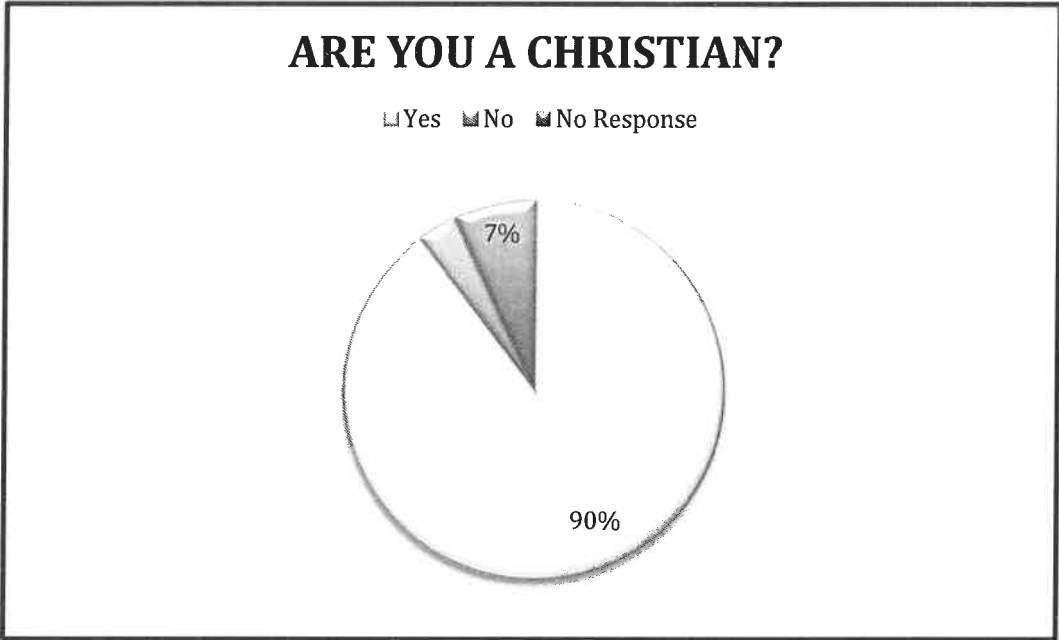
Members Who Attended the Study



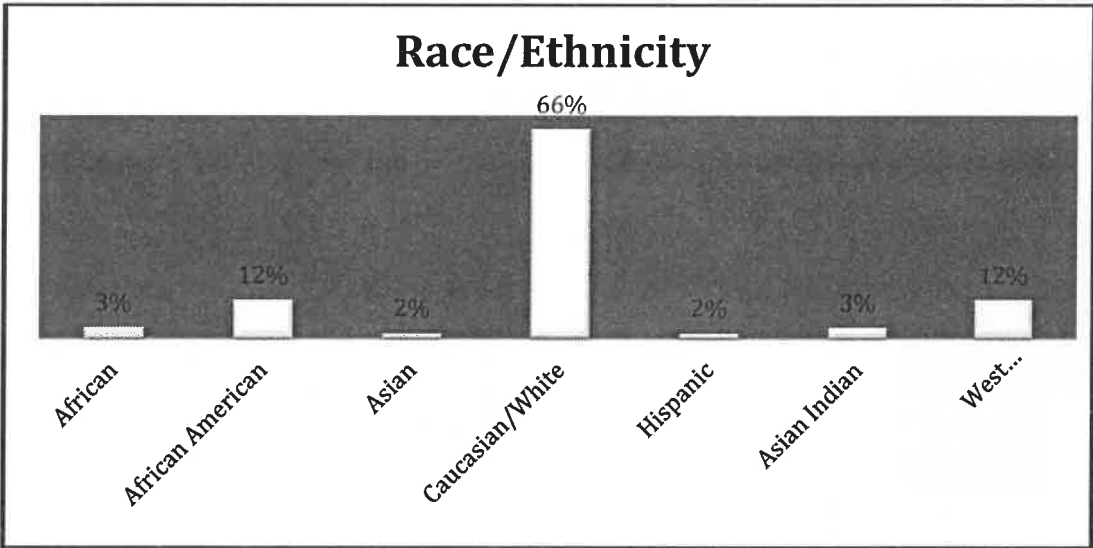
Age Group Participation



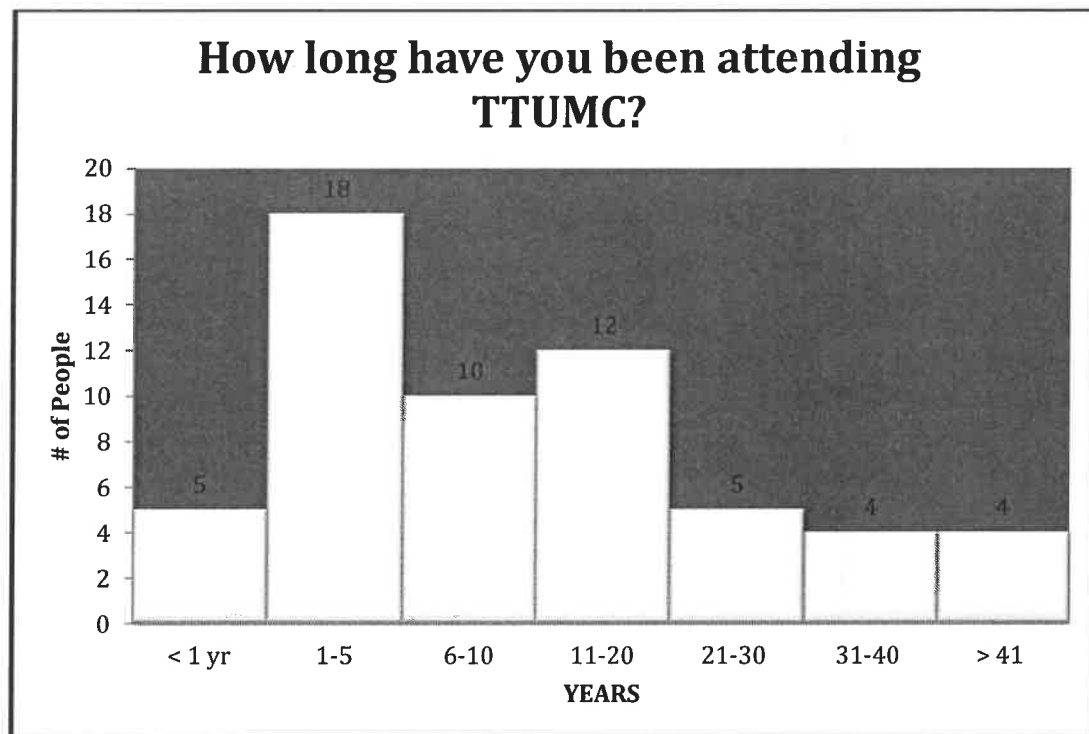
Christian Affiliation



Cultural Identity



Membership Status



1. What does baptism do?

What does Baptism mean?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
Admits me into Gods Family	63.79%	18.97%	8.62%	3.45%	0.00%
Converts me to Christianity	31.03%	15.52%	29.31%	6.90%	0.00%
Assures my Salvation	27.59%	15.52%	34.48%	6.90%	1.72%
Achieves my Salvation	24.14%	8.62%	29.31%	6.90%	5.17%
Eradicates prejudice	41.38%	20.69%	17.24%	5.17%	0.00%
Creates cultural unity in me	44.83%	20.69%	15.52%	0.00%	1.72%
Changes my understanding of others	48.28%	25.86%	13.79%	1.72%	1.72%
Causes me to treat everyone as God's creation	56.90%	20.69%	13.79%	1.72%	0.00%
Causes me to love all Christians	60.34%	18.97%	12.07%	1.72%	0.00%
Makes me equal with others	43.10%	24.14%	12.07%	1.72%	0.00%
Changes my cultural perspective	43.10%	31.03%	15.52%	1.72%	1.72%
Changes my acceptance of others	46.55%	27.59%	12.07%	1.72%	3.45%

2. What does participating in the Eucharist (Holy Communion) do?

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATING IN THE EUCHARIST (HOLY COMMUNION) DO?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure	No Response
Sustains my cultural acceptance of others	51.72%	27.59%	5.17%	0.00%	0.00%	15.52%
Maintains my relationship with God's family	62.07%	22.41%	0.00%	0.00%	1.72%	13.79%
Changes my cultural perspectives of other cultures	39.66%	25.86%	15.52%	0.00%	0.00%	18.97%
Nourishes my faith	63.79%	20.69%	0.00%	0.00%	1.72%	13.79%
Makes me equal with others	41.38%	25.86%	10.34%	0.00%	1.72%	20.69%
Aware of my salvation	32.76%	17.24%	17.24%	6.90%	5.17%	20.69%
Ensures my sin is forgiven	41.38%	20.69%	8.62%	0.00%	0.00%	29.31%
Gradually diminishes my prejudice	41.38%	25.86%	12.07%	0.00%	0.00%	20.69%
Reminds me that I am a sinner	63.79%	17.24%	3.45%	0.00%	0.00%	15.52%
Changes my understanding of others	39.66%	27.59%	10.34%	0.00%	1.72%	20.69%
Causes me to treat everyone as God's creation	55.17%	22.41%	6.90%	0.00%	0.00%	15.52%
Reminds me to love everyone unconditionally	67.24%	13.79%	3.45%	0.00%	0.00%	15.52%

3. What does the Holy Spirit do in me through baptism and the Eucharist?

WHAT DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT DO IN ME THROUGH BAPTISM AND THE EUCHARIST?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure	No Response
Teaches me to love everyone, whatever their race or culture	81.03%	5.17%	3.45%	0.00%	0.00%	10.34%
Enables me to experience unity in diversity	72.41%	12.07%	3.45%	0.00%	0.00%	12.07%
Teaches me that all people are God's creation	79.31%	8.62%	1.72%	0.00%	0.00%	10.34%
Decreases my focus on myself	62.07%	24.14%	1.72%	0.00%	0.00%	12.07%
Helps me value people who are different from me	75.86%	12.07%	1.72%	0.00%	0.00%	10.34%
Brings me strength	72.41%	8.62%	3.45%	0.00%	0.00%	15.52%
Empowers me to embrace interracial diversity	77.59%	10.34%	1.72%	0.00%	0.00%	10.34%
Changes me to be more Christ-like	74.14%	10.34%	3.45%	0.00%	0.00%	12.07%

SUMMARY OF LEARNING

Owen C. Thomas offered the church a refreshing perspective when he noted that the Church's understanding of God and the gospel is being expanded and deepened. He went on to say human language is constantly changing in meaning and must be revised regularly in order to maintain continuity.⁶ This understanding has the potential to provide

⁶ Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 3.

flexibility and open-mindedness to the reader when seeking an understanding of the biblical narratives that involve issues that are relevant to their times. This is an important insight that the church must consider, as Thomas rightly asserts, our understanding of ourselves, our language and concepts, the issues we face, and the questions we raise about Christian faith changes from age to age.⁷

The objective of this study is to lend power to the language of racial diversity in a biblical text, and to demonstrate that God's will for God's redeemed community is to live in unity through diversity. The presentation of sermons and Bible study sessions were designed to provide the appropriate knowledge for Christians to embrace interracial relationships as ordained by God. The teaching modules were also aimed at offering a theological perspective on why the church's majority cultures should view individuals and other minority cultures as people of equal worth.

The context associates that were assigned to this project embraced it with enthusiasm and commitment. They read the foundational papers and were poised as they engaged with the church to participate in this project. One interesting observation within the context Associates' team was their discomfort in preparing the survey questions that dealt with race related issues. There were many long discussions on the wording of the phases that involved race, culture, or diversity. Racism was the elephant in the room that no one wanted to acknowledge. The tension was so pervasive that we decided to keep the identity of the respondents to the survey anonymous. We felt that if the respondents knew that their responses would not be traceable to them that they would be more honest. It was clear that we were dealing with a very sensitive issue within the leaders of the

⁷ Thomas and Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 3.

context associate team who represented the diversity of the church. The members of the context associate team were not privileged to the sermons or the Bible study; they received that information together with those who signed the consent form.

As expected, because of the seven consecutive weeks of the study, there were more individuals who took the pre-survey than those who took the post-survey. The data that was gathered only represent those who signed the consent form; took the pre-survey; listened to and read the four sermons; attended the Bible study that covered the work of the Holy Spirit, baptism and the Eucharist, and took the post survey.

This study reflected a positive change in every category after the recipients received biblical preaching and Bible study on God's will for the diverse world in which we live. There was a positive percentage change in all the categories of the study. However for the purpose of this study, the greater increases were related in the questions that dealt with Godly interracial behaviors toward others.

In the pre-survey questions under baptism, namely: eradicate prejudice, create cultural unity in me, and change my understanding of others, the results reflected a low correlation between baptism and interracial unity. These findings reflect a behavioral reality that being accepted into the Body of Christ by Christ does not have the same implication in homogeneous cultures as it does in interracial cultures. For this reason, it is difficult to speak about *koinonia* in interracial churches when the cultures do not interpret God's will for humanity to co-exist harmoniously and interdependently to fulfill the will of God through Baptism. It is for this reason that theologians must continually look at scripture with fresh eyes, not only as we understand ourselves and our culture, but also as we understand others' cultures.

After the study, the same three questions were asked of the same recipients and the average responses were over 44%. Understanding that this is a percentage change and not an actual change, these results are remarkable for the church. How can intelligent individuals make such a drastic change over a seven-week period, when they were collectively attending church on an average over twenty years? A simple answer could be that the teaching they received was outstanding, enlightening or insightful. A closer look however may reveal that the answer resides in the fact that they were prepared to read and interpret scripture through the lenses of otherness. They heard with fresh ears and a renewed heart what Peter told his Jewish friends in Cornelius' home, "Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did" (Acts 10:47, NLT). Knowledge leads to understanding and understanding can change behavior. Koinonia is presenting itself in pockets of the church and minorities are being invited with joy to participate in corporate worship.

In the pre-survey questions under the Eucharist, namely: sustains my cultural acceptance of others, changes my cultural perspective of others, and changes my understanding of others, the collective average response was under 9%. This statistic is staggering in a diverse setting when communion represents at its basic level, being in communion with God and each other. It is as if the church is focusing on the elements and not the meaning. It is as if we believe that God's grace flows through the elements of bread and wine and not what they represent. There is some validity to why the church has removed the mystery from the Eucharist, and that may be a result of the church's understanding of the Eucharist. A reminder of what Volf taught us after the pre-survey is always refreshing.

The Eucharist is the ritual time in which we celebrate this divine “making-space-for-us-and-inviting-us-in.” Eating the bread and drinking the wine, we remember the body broken “for us” who were God's enemies, and the blood spilled to establish a “new covenant” with us who have broken the covenant (1 Cor 11: 24-25). We would most profoundly misunderstand the Eucharist, however, if we thought of it only as a sacrament of God's embrace of which we are simply the fortunate beneficiaries. Inscribed on the very heart of God's grace is the rule that we can be its recipients only if we do not resist being made into its agents; what happens to us must be done by us.⁸

After receiving this teaching, the same three questions were given to the identical recipients and the average response was 43%. As stated earlier, the Eucharist is not a matter of eating and drinking, but it is a matter of the heart.

In the pre-survey questions under the work of the Holy Spirit, namely: teaches me to love everyone whatever their race or culture; enables me to experience unity in diversity, and empowers me to embrace interracial diversity, the average response was 42%. This was a very uplifting result that gave a positive outlook on the role of the Holy Spirit in interracial diversity. It lends optimism to the openness of the recipients as they sense the Holy Spirit working in communion. However, after the teaching, the same questions when asked provided an average response of 76%. The teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit created a perspective that connect different cultures as one family under God's care.

Conclusion

People learn in many different ways and learnt behaviors can be very impactful. This study has revealed that systematic teaching is very important whether it is negative or positive. It is important that Christians are taught the Bible through refreshed lenses

⁸ Volf, Miroslav, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 129.

and be given an opportunity to have a healthy look at interracial diversity through the lenses of a God who ordains it as healthy and heavenly bound. Creating a safe space for minorities to worship in corporate settings with majority cultures is possible if an understanding of baptism and the Eucharist are authentically taught through the complex lenses of interracial diversity.

“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the lamb” (Rev 7:9 NIV).

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